Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 20, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mullin:

We write with serious concern about the August 2026 purchase of the abandoned Prairie Correctional Facility in Appleton, Minnesota, by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from CoreCivic for $495,600,000.[1] This same facility had previously been offered for sale to the State of Minnesota for $75 million just over a year before the Trump administration's purchase. We also have deep concerns about the conditions of the Prairie Correctional Facility, which recently reopened as a 1,600-bed immigration detention center.[2] The facility opened during the deadliest period for people in ICE custody in more than two decades. It is also the product of a costly and hasty detention expansion that jeopardizes local property tax dollars and that Congress's own watchdog has found is wasting taxpayer money.[3] We request answers about the purchase of this facility, the terms of DHS's arrangement with CoreCivic, and how ICE intends to protect the health and lives of the people it will hold there.

Prairie is ICE's second attempt to build large-scale detention in Minnesota. Earlier this year, ICE pursued plans to convert warehouses in Shakopee and Woodbury into detention centers, as part of a new "detention reengineering" scheme.[4] Both Minnesota proposals collapsed. Nationwide, ICE spent $1.07 billion on 11 warehouses before scrapping the plan amid public opposition and the department's own failure to conduct appropriate due diligence and planning.[5] The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported last week that ICE has already spent $20 million it will not recover on the seven warehouses it is now attempting to sell, and concluded that without a comprehensive strategic plan, ICE has wasted taxpayer funds on failed initiatives and lacks key information on the long-term affordability of its investments.[6]

Having abandoned most of its plan to purchase warehouses for conversion into detention facilities, ICE turned to buying private prisons. In July, DHS paid CoreCivic $1.47 billion for two California facilities.[7] For one of those facilities, the Otay Mesa Detention Center, DHS reportedly paid $739 million, even though county

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[1] AJ Lagoe, , *KARE 11 Investigates: Private Prison Was on Sale for $75 Million; ICE Paid $495 Million*, KARE 11 (Nov. 11, 2026), https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/controversial-appleton-prison-opens/89-4ace3a7e-2160-4611-b5d6-67691b7fe758.
[2] Felicity Dachel, *Controversial Appleton prison opens* (Nov. 10, 2026), *https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/controversial-appleton-prison-opens/89-4ace3a7e-2160-4611-b5d6-67691b7fe758*
[3] McVan, *supra* note 2; U.S. Gov't Accountability Off., GAO-26-108663, *Immigration Detention: Urgent Planning Needed to Avoid Further Waste of Taxpayer Dollars* (2026), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108663.pdf.
[4] Brittany Gibson & Kyle Stokes, *Minnesota Suburbs Push Back Against ICE's Warehouse Search*, Axios Twin Cities (Feb. 3, 2026), https://www.axios.com/local/twin-cities/2026/02/03/minnesota-ice-detention-space.
[5] GAO-26-108663, *supra* note 3, at 8, 13.
[6] *See* GAO-26-108663, *supra* note 3.
[7] CoreCivic, Inc., Press Release, *CoreCivic Sells Two Detention Facilities* (July 6, 2026), https://www.barchart.com/story/news/3140162/corecivic-sells-two-detention-facilities.

property tax records valued the facility at $168 million earlier this year.[8] In August, ICE bought two more CoreCivic facilities, in Kansas and the Prairie facility in Minnesota, for a combined $734 million.[9]

The rapid purchase of multiple private prisons is especially concerning because GAO found ICE forecasted costs for several of its new facilities only three years out, with no plan for how to pay for them once congressionally allocated funds run out.[10] Operations and maintenance typically account for 60 to 80 percent of a federal building's lifetime costs, yet ICE did not evaluate the long-term cost of owning these facilities.[11] DHS told GAO it will not complete a strategic plan until August 31, 2027.[12]

DHS purchased the Prairie Correctional Facility from CoreCivic for nearly $495,600,000.[13] According to a recent KARE 11 investigation, CoreCivic offered to sell that same facility to the State of Minnesota for only $75 million in May 2025, just over a year before the federal purchase.[14] This $75 million price tag was "inclusive of the upgrades CoreCivic had identified would be needed to re-activate the facility."[15] Paul Schnell, Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Corrections, said he was "stunned given the reality of the offer that had been made to us just a little over a year prior to that."[16] We are deeply concerned by this overpayment and the apparent misuse of taxpayer dollars, particularly when reports indicate that this private prison company donated half a million dollars to the Trump-Vance inaugural committee.[17]

CoreCivic also announced a five-year ICE contract to manage the Prairie facility, which had sat idle since 2010.[18] The contract pays a fixed monthly amount plus an additional per diem based on the population at the facility. The total contract value listed on the federal award management website exceeds $536 million over five years.[19]

Taxpayers are paying CoreCivic twice: once to buy a private prison that sat empty for sixteen years, for $495.6 million, and again to have that same company run it under a five-year contract worth more than $536 million. At a time when Minnesota families are struggling with the cost of health care, housing, and gas, why is DHS paying a private prison company more than $1 billion in taxpayer funds for a single immigrant detention facility?

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[8] *Records Show Otay Mesa Detention Center Was Valued at $168M, Sold for $739M*, NBC 7 San Diego (July 9, 2026), https://www.nbcsandiego.com/news/local/county-records-show-otay-mesa-detention-center-valued-168m/4047201/.
[9] CoreCivic, Inc., Press Release, *CoreCivic Sells Two Additional Detention Facilities* (Aug. 5, 2026), https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2026/08/05/3339261/0/en/CoreCivic-Sells-Two-Additional-Detention-Facilities.html; *see also* GAO-26-108663, *supra* note 3, at 12 & n.43.
[10] GAO-26-108663, *supra* note 3, at 12 & n.43.
[11] *Id.*
[12] *Id.* at 13.
[13] CoreCivic, Inc., Press Release, *CoreCivic Sells Two Additional Detention Facilities*, *supra* note 9.
[14] AJ Lagoe, *KARE 11 Investigates: Private Prison Was on Sale for $75 Million; ICE Paid $495 Million*, KARE 11 (Oct. 29, 2026), https://www.kare11.com/article/news/investigations/kare-11-investigates-private-prison-was-on-sale-for-75-million-ice-paid-495-million/89-4b28b6c7-8823-42b3-9f70-95a78f714e18.
[15] *Id.*
[16] *Id.*
[17] Lagoe, *supra* note 11.
[18] CoreCivic, Inc., Press Release, *CoreCivic Announces New Contract Award at Prairie Correctional Facility* (Aug. 4, 2026), https://corecivic.gcs-web.com/node/25536.
[19] Madison McVan, *ICE, CoreCivic to Open Appleton Immigrant Detention Center This Year*, Minn. Reformer (Aug. 4, 2026), https://minnesotareformer.com/2026/08/04/ice-corecivic-to-open-appleton-immigrant-detention-center-this-year/.

In addition to our concerns about the overpayment of taxpayer dollars for CoreCivic's facilities and management contracts, we also have significant concerns about CoreCivic's ability to safely operate these facilities. This stems from CoreCivic's troubling past. In 2016, the Federal Bureau of Prisons canceled its contract for CoreCivic's Cibola County Correctional Center after investigative reporting exposed deaths in which federal monitors noted sustained neglect or deficient care.[20] Yet ICE contracted with CoreCivic to keep the same facility open for immigration detention.[21]

Furthermore, CoreCivic's operation of other ICE facilities gives us no confidence that appropriate safety precautions will be taken for people detained at Prairie. At its Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia, Denny Adan Gonzalez, a 33-year-old from Cuba, died on April 28, 2026, in a suspected suicide.[22] Jesus Molina-Veya also died at Stewart in June 2025, the facility's thirteenth death and third suicide since ICE began using it in 2006.[23] A court filing describes Stewart staff failing to respond adequately to another man's request for medical help until he passed out and was taken to a hospital about an hour away; he said a doctor told him he had narrowly escaped amputation of his left leg.[24]

The Prairie facility has been male-only for its entire existence. If this facility plans on holding women as well, we are concerned that this facility lacks the capacity to care for pregnant women, including by providing labor and delivery services and pre- and post-natal care consistent with ICE directives. Similarly, nearby health care facilities do not have labor and delivery units.

The reports from facilities that CoreCivic manages are part of a negligent detention system that is failing to meet the most basic humanitarian standard of keeping people alive. In 2025, ICE reported 33 deaths in custody, the most in more than two decades, and at least 32 people have reportedly died in ICE custody so far in 2026.[25] Less than a year removed from Operation Metro Surge, we fear that expanding DHS's detention efforts to Prairie will incentivize ICE to replicate the unconstitutional enforcement tactics that terrorized our state and resulted in the deaths of two Minnesotans. These risks demand robust oversight and transparency. To that end, we request written responses to the following by December 3:

1. Please provide copies of the ICE–CoreCivic operating contract and the DHS purchase agreement for the Prairie Correctional Facility, including the fixed monthly payment amount, per diem rates, and any guaranteed minimum occupancy.

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[20] Seth Freed Wessler, *The Feds Will Shut Down the Troubled Private Prison in a 'Nation' Investigation*, The Nation (Aug. 15, 2016), https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/feds-will-shut-down-troubled-private-prison-in-nation-investigation/.

[21] Seth Freed Wessler, *ICE Plans to Reopen the Very Same Private Prison the Feds Just Closed*, The Nation (Oct. 27, 2016), https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/ice-plans-to-reopen-the-very-same-private-prison-the-feds-just-closed/; *see also Inside a Private Prison's $150 Million Deal to Detain Immigrants in New Mexico*, Truthout, https://truthout.org/articles/inside-a-private-prison-s-150-million-deal-to-detain-immigrants-in-new-mexico/.

[22] Ted Hesson, *Cuban Immigrant Died in ICE Custody in Suspected Suicide, Agency Says*, Reuters (May 1, 2026), https://www.reuters.com/world/us/cuban-immigrant-died-ice-custody-georgia-notice-us-lawmakers-says-2026-05-01/.

[23] Press Release, Detention Watch Network, *Third Death by Suicide in Georgia's ICE Detention Center, Advocates Call for Immediate Action to Close Stewart Detention Center* (July 2025), https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/pressroom/releases/2025/third-death-suicide-georgias-ice-detention-center-advocates-call-immediate; *see also* U.S. Immigr. & Customs Enf't, *Detainee Death Report: Molina-Veya, Jesus* (2025), https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/reports/ddrJesusMolinaVeya.pdf.

[24] Rae Ellen Bichell et al., *From Festering Infections to Untreated Cancer, ICE Detainees Across the US Describe Medical Neglect*, Associated Press & KFF Health News (June 2, 2026), https://www.wlrn.org/immigration/2026-06-02/from-festering-infections-to-untreated-cancer-ice-detainees-across-the-us-describe-medical-neglect.

[25] *ICE Death Dashboard*, https://detentionmortality.com/ (last visited Oct. 1, 2026).

2. What analysis did DHS conduct to justify paying nearly $496,000,000 for a facility that had been idle since 2010? Was an independent appraisal performed, and what alternatives were considered? Please provide a copy of all appraisal reports any document that discusses the value of the property and purchase price.
3. When and how did DHS become aware of the $75 million purchase price offered to the State of Minnesota in May 2025?
4. Minnesota declined the $75 million offer because of concerns about staffing and the services needed to operate a prison in a rural community with limited medical infrastructure.[26] How does DHS plan to address those concerns?
5. What repairs, rehabilitations, or modernizations have been undertaken to ensure the health and safety of those detained in the facility?
6. Will the facility detain both men and women?
7. If this will be an all-gender facility, what conversions or modifications have been made to transition the facility from all-male to all-gender?
8. Why does DHS continue to pay CoreCivic to operate a facility the government now owns? Was a government-operated model evaluated? If not, why not? If so, please provide the evaluation related documents.
9. What is the projected population by quarter through mid-2027?
10. What will be the legal posture of detained individuals at the facility? For example, are they subject to final removal orders or do they have pending cases?
11. Which detention standards will govern the facility, and did ICE or an independent body complete a pre-occupancy inspection?
12. What medical staffing levels does the contract require, including physicians, nurses, and mental health professionals, and how will CoreCivic meet them in a rural area?
13. Has DHS conducted an analysis of emergency medical care at the facility? What are the transport times to the nearest hospital, and what protocols govern emergency transfers?
14. What suicide prevention measures, including screening, observation, and limits on segregation, will be in place, given the suicides at CoreCivic's Stewart Detention Center?

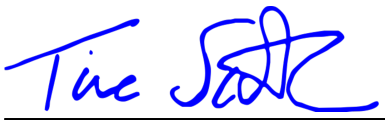
We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

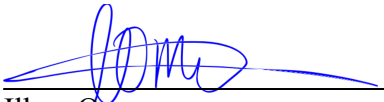
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

Bennie G. Thompson
Member of Congress

[26] Lagoe, *supra* note 11.



Tina Smith
United States Senator



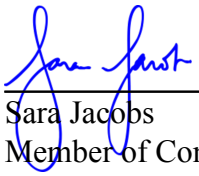
Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



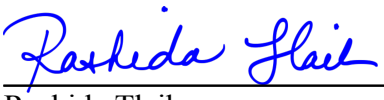
Angie Craig
Member of Congress



Kelly Morrison
Member of Congress



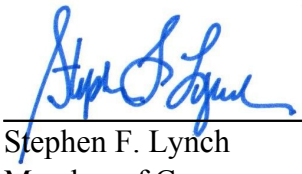
Sara Jacobs
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