



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

***Moving Toward More Effective Immigration
Detention Management***

December 10, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism Subcommittee hearing entitled *Moving Toward More Effective Immigration Detention Management*:

“Our Nation’s immigration detention system has been broken for far too long. In recent years, we have heard troubling reports of detainee deaths, inadequate medical care, and inappropriate conditions for families in detention.

Some of these incidents have occurred at DHS-operated facilities around the country, while others have occurred at contract facilities. Indeed, immigration detention has become big business, with private corporations and other contractors providing the overwhelming majority of detention beds to the Federal government.

The Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement have a responsibility to ensure that these contractors are operating in accordance with applicable detention standards.

However, the sprawling and decentralized structure of the detention system has made robust oversight a challenge. DHS and ICE also must make certain that American taxpayers are getting what they are paying for with these contracts.

With these concerns in mind, I was pleased that DHS recently announced a series of new initiatives as part of its ongoing immigration detention reform efforts.

The reforms are intended to address the major detention system issues identified in a comprehensive review conducted earlier this year by ICE earlier, under the direction of Dr. Schriro who is here today.

I am encouraged that the Department recognizes the need for enhanced federal oversight, improved detainee care, and increased uniformity at detention facilities. Recognizing the need for improvement is a good first step, but actually implementing those improvements will be no easy task.

To understand the magnitude of the challenge, it is important to note that DHS has over 30,000 aliens in custody on any given day. That is a five-fold increase from 15 years ago.

The witnesses before us today have a variety of experience and perspectives on this

issue. I hope to hear from them about their opinions on the current state of immigration detention in this country and how it can best be reformed.

It is my understanding that Chairwoman Sanchez plans to follow this hearing with a hearing next year on this topic with Department officials. Today's hearing should provide an excellent foundation for that hearing and for future Committee efforts on this topic."

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