

# Campaign to Shut Down Berks

Pennsylvania is currently home to the Berks County Family Detention Center (BCRC), one of three detention centers for immigrant families, where children as young as two-weeks-old have been incarcerated, and families have been held for more than a year at a time.

In 2019 the Berks County Detention Center (BCRC) will be entering its fifth year in operation as a immigrant family prison. That is five years of human rights abuses, due process violations, disregard of Pennsylvania and Federal law and the immoral and unjust treatment of immigrant families. The Shut Down Berks Coalition will continue to fight until this inhumane prison is shut down and family detention is put to an end in Pennsylvania. Governor Tom Wolf, Lt. Governor John Fetterman and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services have the power to issue an Emergency Removal Order (ERO) on the Berks County Detention Center, an action that would ensure the facility can no longer be used as a prison. It is not only their moral obligation

The continued incarceration of these immigrant families and the operation of BCRC is a disgrace and a stain on our Commonwealth. However, this stain could be erased by the PA Department of Human Services (PA DHS) and Governor Tom Wolf, who have the power to shut the doors of BCRC and pressure ICE to release these families. Unfortunately, neither PA DHS nor Governor Wolf have shown to have the political will to fully pursue all means available for releasing these families and shutting the center down.

In August 2015, a Federal Court determined that the practice of detaining children in jail-like settings is illegal, and ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to immediately release all families held in immigrant family detention centers in Texas and Pennsylvania (see [full report on federal litigation](#)). In January 2016, the PA Department of Human Services [revoked the license](#) to operate the Berks County Family Residential Center, and the facility license has been under legal review since February 22, 2016. In the past two years the Shut Down Berks Coalition has repeatedly presented PA DHS and the Governor's office with information on the human rights violations taking place at BCRC and what actions he can take to protect and release these families (see Human Rights First reports from [Aug. 2015](#) and [Feb. 2016](#)). Extensive legal research was presented directly to Governor Wolf outlining the specific powers that he and PA DHS has to shut down BCRC, and yet they have refused to take action. The laundry list of abuses suffered by parents and children, children as young as two weeks old, has not been enough to spur anything more than minimal action.

This nation, this state, that speaks of liberty and justice, will only speak hollow words until the Berks County Family Detention Center and all family detention centers are closed. During a time where the national dialogue includes talk of reviving internment camps and religious registries, now is the time for Governor Wolf to take action. Every day BCRC is allowed to operate, is another day of legitimizing the growing movement of hate, racism, and xenophobia plaguing our country.

**Stay Informed!** Follow the Shut Down Berks Campaign on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) and [subscribe to the newsletter](#)!

Read more on the harms caused by family detention and recommendations for ending family detention:

- American Immigration Council Report “[Divided by Detention: Asylum-Seeking Families’ Experiences of Separation](#)”
- [AILA resources](#) on Family Detention. 2016.
- “[Detained children risk life-long physical and mental harm](#)” Karen Zwi, Pediatrician and Associate Professor, UNSW. 2015.
- Human Rights First “[Family Detention: Still Happening, Still Damaging](#)”
- [Grassroots Leadership resources](#) on Family Detention
- [Why Detaining Children is Harmful](#). UNICEF. 2018.
- [Mental health implications of detaining asylum seekers: systematic review](#). The British Journal of Psychiatry
- [Detention of Immigrant Children](#). Council on Community Pediatrics. 2017

The **Shut Down Berks Coalition** is a group of organizations and individuals fighting to close the Berks family prison in Pennsylvania and end the practice of imprisoning immigrant families in the U.S.

### Shut Down Berks Campaign Press\*

April 25, 2018. [The truth about the Berks County Residential Center](#). Al Día

The continued incarceration of these immigrant families and the operation of BCRC is a disgrace and a stain on our Commonwealth. However, this stain could be erased by the PA Department of Human Services (PA DHS) and Governor Tom Wolf, who have the power to shut the doors of BCRC and pressure ICE to release these families. Unfortunately, neither PA DHS nor Governor Wolf have shown to have the political will to fully pursue all means available for releasing these families and shutting the center down.

In August 2015, a Federal Court determined that the practice of detaining children in jail-like settings is illegal, and ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to immediately release all families held in immigrant family detention centers in Texas and Pennsylvania (see [full report on federal litigation](#)). In January 2016, the PA Department of Human Services [revoked the license](#) to operate the Berks County Family Residential Center, and the facility license has been under legal review since February 22, 2016. In the past two years the Shut Down Berks Coalition has repeatedly presented PA DHS and the Governor’s office with information on the human rights violations taking place at BCRC and what actions he can take to protect and release these families (see Human Rights First reports from [Aug. 2015](#) and [Feb. 2016](#)). Extensive legal research was presented directly to Governor Wolf outlining the specific powers that he and PA DHS

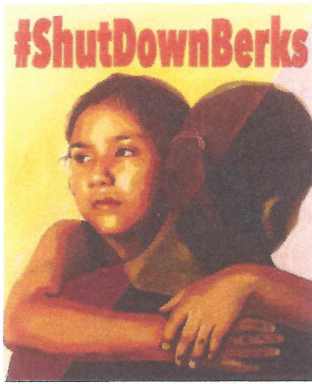
has to shut down BCRC, and yet they have refused to take action. The laundry list of abuses suffered by parents and children, children as young as two weeks old, has not been enough to spur anything more than minimal action.

This nation, this state, that speaks of liberty and justice, will only speak hollow words until the Berks County Family Detention Center and all family detention centers are closed. During a time where the national dialogue includes talk of reviving internment camps and religious registries, now is the time for Governor Wolf to take action. Every day BCRC is allowed to operate, is another day of legitimizing the growing movement of hate, racism, and xenophobia plaguing our country.

The **Shut Down Berks Coalition** is a group of organizations and individuals fighting to close the Berks family prison in Pennsylvania and end the practice of imprisoning immigrant families in the U.S.



# 6 Ways to Take Action to #ShutDownBerks



## END FAMILY DETENTION!

Call Governor Tom Wolf 717-787-2500 to issue an ERO for the families at Berks family prison.

Family Detention is immoral and unlawful. That is why Governor Wolf, Lt. Governor Fetterman and PA Department of Human Services Secretary, Teresa Miller, need to act NOW and issue an Emergency Removal Order on the Berks County Detention Center. Then convert it into a drug treatment facility. Here are five ways you can take action to #ShutDownBerks and #EndFamilyDetention in Pennsylvania.

### 1. Stay Connected

Get the latest updates on the campaign by following us on social media and signing up for our newsletter.

Twitter: [@ShutDownBerks](https://twitter.com/ShutDownBerks)

Facebook: [@ShutDownBerksCoalition](https://www.facebook.com/ShutDownBerksCoalition)

Instagram: [@ShutDownBerksCoalition](https://www.instagram.com/ShutDownBerksCoalition)

Text: 717-500-1852

Newsletter: <https://www.facebook.com/ShutDownBerksCoalition/app/100265896690345/>

### 2. Make A Donation

Support the organizing efforts by donating at <https://freemigrationproject.org/shut-down-berks-campaign>

### 3. Make A Phone Call

Call today, and every day, to tell the Governor's office;

*"Protecting Immigrant Families is the right thing to do. You absolutely have the power to **Issue an Emergency Removal Order** on the Berks County Detention Center. And you don't have to wait for the license litigation to be over. Issue the ERO now and convert the prison into a drug treatment facility!"*

**Governor Tom Wolf (717-787-2500)**

**Lt. Governor Fetterman (717-787-3300)**

**PA DHS Secretary Miller (717-787-2600)**

### 3. Write A Letter

Write a letter and tell the Governor and his administration in your own words why you want him to #ShutDownBerks to #EndFamilyDetention in Pennsylvania.

**Office of the Governor P.A.**  
**508 Main Capitol Building**  
**Harrisburg, PA 17120**

**Department of Human Services**  
**P.O. Box 2675**  
**Harrisburg, PA 17105**

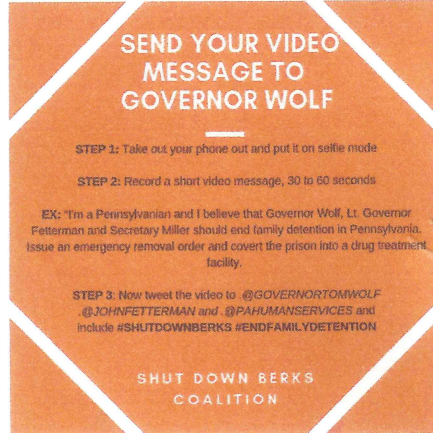
### 4. Send A Video Message

Take one minute to send a video message to the Governor using your social media accounts.

**Step 1:** Take out your phone and put it on selfie mode

**Step 2:** Record a short message of 30-60 seconds long. Ex: *"I'm a Pennsylvania resident and I believe that Governor Wolf, Lt. Governor Fetterman and Secretary Miller MUST end family detention in Pennsylvania by immediately issuing an emergency removal order for the Berks County Detention Center and convert it into a drug treatment facility."*

**Step 3:** Post the message to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or any other social media platform. Tag @GovernorTomWolf @JohnFetterman and @SecretaryMiller and include #ShutDownBerks and #EndFamilyDetention



### 5. Lobby

Join us on the first Thursday of the month for our online training on how to lobby Governor Wolf. Go to our events section of our Facebook page to get the latest information of the next webinar. Learn about the history of the immigrant family detention in Pennsylvania, the principles of the Shut Down Berks Coalition and why Governor Wolf can and should shut it down now.

Please feel free to contact us regarding on any of the above information at [shutdownberks@gmail.com](mailto:shutdownberks@gmail.com).

In Solidarity,

**The Shut Down Berks Coalition**