



January 16, 2019

Sheriff Michelle LaJoye-Young  
Kent County Sheriff's Department  
701 Ball Ave NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Kent County Board of Commissioners  
County Administration Building  
300 Monroe Avenue NW  
Grand Rapids MI 49503

**RE: Kent County Sheriff's Department Delivering United States Citizen to Immigration and Customs Enforcement for Deportation**

Dear Sheriff LaJoye-Young, Dear County Commissioners,

On December 14, 2018, the Kent County Sheriff's Department handed a United States citizen and decorated Marine combat veteran over to U.S. Immigration and Customs (ICE) officials so that he could be deported. The veteran, Jilmar Ramos-Gomez, was born in Grand Rapids, grew up here, and bravely served our country in Afghanistan. We are outraged, and demand that the Sheriff's Department conduct an immediate investigation and report its finding at the next County Commission meeting on January 24, 2019. This terrible incident is the predictable consequence of the Sheriff's Department's decision to volunteer its resources to support ICE's efforts to deport Kent County residents, a policy that the community has repeatedly and persuasively asked the Department to end.

Mr. Ramos-Gomez was born in Grand Rapids in 1991. After graduating from high school, he enlisted in the marines, serving from 2011-2014 as a lance corporal and tank crewman. He saw combat in Afghanistan, and was decorated with a national defense service medal, a global war on terrorism service medal, an Afghanistan campaign medal, and a combat action ribbon, among other awards. But when he returned home, he was a shell of his former self, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after what he had seen. His family reports that he is focused on returning for his marine brothers in

Afghanistan. He has episodes where he disappears and when he is found again, he often has no recollection of where he has been.

One such incident happened at the end of last year. Mr. Ramos-Gomez was arrested on November 21, 2018 after apparently damaging a fire alarm at Spectrum Health and trespassing on the heliport. The police report shows that Mr. Ramos-Gomez had his passport on him when he was arrested. He pled guilty to a trespassing charge, and the judge ordered him released on a personal recognizance bond on Friday, December 14, 2018, pending a pre-sentence investigation.

At that point, the Kent County Sheriff's Department should have immediately released Mr. Ramos-Gomez. Instead, the Sheriff's Department worked with ICE agents to enable his transfer to an immigration detention center in Calhoun County to start the deportation process. Publicly available jail records show that Mr. Ramos-Gomez was subject to a detainer, i.e. an ICE hold, and that the jail turned him over on December 14, 2018. It is unclear how that was possible or why the jail believed it should hand Mr. Ramos-Gomez over to ICE, rather than release him as required by the court order.

What we know is that when Mr. Ramos-Gomez's mother arrived at the jail to bring him home, she was told that he was in ICE custody. Not until Monday, December 17, 2018—after Mr. Ramos-Gomez had spent three days in the Calhoun immigration detention center—was his family able to secure his release from ICE, through his attorney Richard Kessler. His mental health has deteriorated even further as a result of his unlawful incarceration.

It is incomprehensible that the Sheriff's Department turned a vulnerable, mentally ill United States citizen over to ICE so that he could be deported from his country—a country for which he fought on the battle field. Mr. Ramos-Gomez risked his life protecting the rest of us. When he needed mental health services as a result, our government failed him. And now, Kent County has further failed him by facilitating ICE's efforts to illegally detain and deport him.

While what the Kent County Sheriff's Department did to Mr. Ramos-Gomez is unfathomable, it is also utterly unsurprising. This is exactly the type of incident that advocates have warned could happen. For over a year, the community has been calling on Kent County to end its abusive and destructive practice of collaborating with ICE. Advocates have come again and again to County Commission meetings. Hundreds of residents have signed a letter calling on the Sheriff's Department to end the contract with ICE and on the Kent County Commission to take steps to make Kent County a

welcoming community.<sup>1</sup> And our organizations have provided detailed legal analysis explaining that the Kent County Sheriff's Department practice of *volunteering* to assist ICE with deportations exposes the County to significant legal liability.<sup>2</sup> Research has shown conclusively that local law enforcement's collaboration with ICE increases instances of racial profiling, and sows distrust between the community and law enforcement. This voluntary practice can be stopped at any time. The time to do so is now.

What will it take for our leaders to finally listen to their constituents? Does a U.S. citizen combat veteran have to get handed over for deportation? Or will even that not be enough to end the ICE-Kent County collaboration that is directly responsible for the harm not just to Mr. Ramos-Gomez but to so many other community members?

We are demanding an immediate investigation into why the Kent County Sheriff's Department held a United States citizen for ICE and then, instead of releasing him as legally required on December 14, 2018, caused him to be transferred to ICE detention where he was illegally held for three days.

Because Mr. Ramos-Gomez, his family, and the public all deserve to know how and why the Sheriff's Department delivered Mr. Ramos-Gomez to ICE, we demand that the Sheriff's Department present the results of its investigation at the County Commission meeting on January 24, 2019, and publicly answer questions about what happened. Finally, we demand that at the Commission meeting the Sheriff's Department address whether it will continue to cling to its failed policy of collaborating with ICE, or whether, in light of this terrible incident, it will at long last end its contract with ICE and cease using County resources to tear our community apart, harming immigrants and citizens alike.

We further ask, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, MCL § 15.231 *et. seq.*, that you provide us with all records in the possession of both Kent County and the Kent

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<sup>1</sup> The November 8, 2018 community letter, with a list of signatories up to that date, is available at:

[http://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming\\_Communities\\_Letter\\_to\\_Kent\\_County\\_Commission\\_Sign-on\\_0.pdf](http://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/Welcoming_Communities_Letter_to_Kent_County_Commission_Sign-on_0.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The ACLU and MIRC's September 27, 2018 letter to the Kent County Sheriff is available at:

[http://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/MIRC\\_ACLU\\_Letter\\_Kent\\_Co\\_Sheriff\\_on\\_Detainers.pdf](http://www.aclumich.org/sites/default/files/MIRC_ACLU_Letter_Kent_Co_Sheriff_on_Detainers.pdf).

County Sheriff's Department concerning Mr. Ramos-Gomez.<sup>3</sup> This specifically includes, but is not limited to:

- All records pertaining to the arrest, transfer, and detention of Mr. Ramos-Gomez from Kent County Correctional Facility to the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in December 2018, including detainers, warrants, or booking records, and including, but not limited to, forms I-247 (all versions), I-200, I-203 or I-203A and I-205.
- All records related to Mr. Ramos-Gomez's detention at the Kent County Correctional Facility, including booking records, intake records, personal property records, custody and disciplinary records, release or court orders, and medical and mental health records.
- All records of communication between Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Kent County Correctional Facility concerning Mr. Ramos Gomez, including all systems communications, e-mails, and records of phone calls or text messages.
- All communications or records concerning Mr. Ramos-Gomez by Kent County staff or elected officials, except those protected by attorney-client privilege.
- All records in your possession pertaining to the detention of Mr. Ramos-Gomez at the Calhoun County Jail by Immigration and Customs Enforcement in December 2018, and all records of communications with the Calhoun County Jail regarding Mr. Ramos-Gomez, including all systems communications, e-mails, and records of phone calls or text messages.
- Any other records maintained by the Kent County Sheriff's Department or Kent County that relate to Mr. Ramos-Gomez.

A release signed by Mr. Ramos-Gomez is attached.

We look forward to receiving a full and complete report at the January 24th Kent County Commission meeting describing why and how this appalling incident occurred, as well as a report on whether Kent County and the Sheriff's Department are finally ready to stop using county resources to deport community members—in this case a community member who is a U.S. citizen and decorated marine veteran.

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<sup>3</sup> The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan (ACLU) and Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC) request that you waive all fees in connection with this request as provided by MCL § 15.234(1) (waiver of fee is appropriate where search for and provision of copies of the public record can be considered as primarily benefiting the general public). The ACLU and MIRC are non-profit organizations, with no commercial interest in obtaining the requested information.

Sincerely,

Miriam Aukerman  
Richard Kessler  
Julia Kelly  
ACLU of Michigan

Hillary Scholten  
Susan Reed  
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center

cc: Linda Howell, Kent County Corporation Counsel