



The
CENTER for
VICTIMS of
TORTURE

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The Center for Victims of Torture Urges Congress to Reject the White House's Supplemental Funding Request, Which Would Continue to Harm Families and Asylum Seekers

ST. PAUL, Minn. & WASHINGTON — The Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) today decried the supplemental funding request by the White House, which would inflict increased harm upon already-traumatized individuals and families seeking safety in the United States.

Just three days after the White House published a memorandum designed to undermine our asylum system, it is now seeking to level yet another blow to asylum seekers. The supplemental request asks Congress to provide an additional \$4.5 billion for detention and other immigration-related expenses just months after Congress came to a budget agreement for the agency through a government shut-down, and after the president appropriated military funds for a border wall by declaring a “national emergency.” Although the ask is masked as humanitarian, it does not entirely seek humanitarian means to address the needs of families and individuals seeking asylum at the border. Congress should reject it.

Increased funding to jail more asylum seekers. The White House is asking for \$260 million to allow ICE to expand the daily detainee population by increasing detention bed space to 54,000 by the end of the fiscal year. Given Attorney General Barr’s recent decision in *Matter of M-S-*, which prohibits certain asylum seekers from receiving bond, expanded bed space means expanded use of indefinite detention. A shocking percentage of asylum seekers are torture survivors. Subjecting them to prolonged indefinite detention has profound [psychological consequences](#).

Expansion of family detention. The White House also seeks to add 960 beds at the infamous family residential center in Dilley, Texas, which advocates have described as a prison. Doing so would result in needless harm. The [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\)](#) has made clear that “even brief detention can cause psychological trauma and induce long-term mental health risks for children.” CVT clinicians’ experience treating adolescent refugee and asylum-seeking torture survivors is consistent with this finding. Perhaps most troubling, it is clear that family detention simply does not serve the purposes for which the White House claims it is necessary, and the administration has rejected the option that does: alternatives to detention. Indeed, [analyses of](#)

[alternatives to detention](#) have demonstrated repeatedly that they are fiscally responsible, humane, and ensure asylum seekers' presence at their immigration court hearings.

Use of CBP Officers as Asylum Officers. The White House is requesting an additional \$107 million to implement a program in which CBP officers will be expected to play the role of captor and ally for asylum seekers. This program seeks to cast CBP officers as both enforcement personnel and asylum officers, and to have them conduct credible fear interviews. These interviews require survivors of torture or extreme trauma to reveal and recount very personal and traumatic information. It is wholly unreasonable to expect them to do so when being questioned by the person who has essentially arrested them. The result would almost surely be deportation of people with legitimate asylum claims; in other words, at U.S. taxpayers' expense, returning them to circumstances where they are likely to face additional persecution. In some cases this would almost certainly violate the Convention against Torture.

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The Center for Victims of Torture is a nonprofit organization headquartered in St. Paul, MN, with offices in Atlanta, GA, and Washington, D.C.; and healing initiatives in Africa and the Middle East. Visit www.cvt.org