



Public Comment Opposing Converting McCook Work Ethic Camp to an Immigration Detention Center

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Dear Chairperson McKinney and Members of the Urban Affairs Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to Governor Pillen's proposal to convert the McCook Work Ethic Camp into an immigration detention center. I am an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Nebraska Omaha and the chapter leader for the Nebraska Scholar Strategy Network. I am here today in my capacity as a concerned naturalized citizen and a social science researcher, not on behalf of the university.

First, the McCook facility was originally designed for 200 people. Expanding its capacity to 300 detainees is unsafe, and it sends the dangerous message that immigrants—most of whom are not charged with any crime—can be treated as less than human.

Second, this plan makes little fiscal sense. Nebraska is already facing a budget crisis, and detention is extremely expensive. According to special report from [ICE \(2025\)](#), it costs about \$152 per day to detain one person, while alternative case management programs cost around \$4.20 per person per day, and achieve 96 to 99 percent compliance with immigration court hearings ([Immigrant Justice 2018](#)). Notably, detention doesn't seem to be justified as enforcement mechanism when compliance has been the norm and studies reveal that more can be done at providing legal counsel and services. A decade long study showed that non-detained immigrant compliance to court hearings averaged 83%, and that having access legal counsel was the best predictor to increase this rate ([American Immigration Council, 2021](#)).

At the same time, research from the University of Nebraska at Omaha shows that immigrant workers in key sectors such as construction and food processing helped generate \$22 billion in production and create nearly 94,409 jobs statewide in 2019 ([UNO OLLAS 2021](#)). In 2025, immigrant-led households in Nebraska also contributed \$620.8 million in state and local taxes ([Vera Institute 2025](#)). Detention facilities cannot match these long-term contributions.

Finally, we must consider the moral and social costs. Detaining immigrants tears families apart and causes lasting trauma to children. In Nebraska alone, approximately 78,900 U.S. citizen children live with at least one immigrant parent ([Vera Institute 2025](#)). These children are part of our schools, our neighborhoods, and our future. This proposal undermines family stability and community trust, and it runs directly against the [calls from Nebraska's business leaders and chambers of commerce](#) who have urged our state to become a more welcoming place for immigrants in order to address labor shortages.

Above all, this plan is unjust. Nebraska values family, hard work, and dignity. Converting McCook into an immigration detention center betrays those values. I strongly urge you to reject this proposal and instead

invest in humane, cost-effective, community-based alternatives that keep families together and strengthen our state.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Nebraska's future.

Sincerely,

Lissette Aliaga Linares