

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 12, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20528

Secretary Hegseth, Secretary Rubio, and Secretary Mullin:

We write to express our grave concern regarding the March 19, 2026 Senate Armed Services Committee testimony of General Francis L. Donovan, Commander of U.S. Southern Command, indicating that SOUTHCOM has an executive order to “support DHS in a mass migration event,” that DHS “would take the lead,” and that SOUTHCOM would use Guantánamo Bay as the primary land-based site to “set up a camp to deal with those migrants” in the event of a migration surge from Cuba. Such a proposal is deeply alarming and unacceptable. It raises serious concerns about the use of a U.S. military facility with a well-documented record of abuse, while externalizing the consequences of U.S. policy toward Cuba by detaining displaced people rather than addressing the conditions driving migration.

Guantánamo has a long and deeply troubling history of abuse. In 1991, over 30,000 Haitians fleeing repression after a coup d’état were held at the base in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions without adequate medical care.¹ In the mid-1990s, tens of thousands of Cubans were similarly detained under harsh conditions, with limited access to food, water, and healthcare.² Since 2002, the facility has become synonymous with torture and open-ended detention in the context of the so-called “Global War on Terror,” where hundreds of men and boys were held without charge or trial.³ To this day, 15 detainees remain at the facility, three of whom have long been cleared for transfer.⁴ Credible international findings, including by the United Nations, have concluded that conditions at Guantánamo have amounted to torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment.⁵

¹ International Refugee Assistance Project. “Offshoring Human Rights: Detention of Refugees at Guantánamo Bay.” September 2024. <https://e1.nmcdn.io/assets/irap/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Offshoring-Human-Rights-Guantanamo-Bay-English-Report-September-2024-1.pdf>.

² “UM Libraries Digital Exhibits: Detention - between Despair and Hope: Cuban Rafters at the U.S. Naval Base Guantánamo Bay, 1994-1996.” Omeka RSS. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://scholar.library.miami.edu/digital/exhibits/show/guantanamo/detention#:~:text=In%20Guant%C3%A1namo%20Cubans%20were%20crowded,camps%20with%20their%20foul%20odor.>

³ “Guantánamo Bay Detention Facility: An Overview.” Center for Victims of Torture, January 7, 2026. <https://www.cvt.org/what-we-do/advocating-for-change/legacy-of-us-torture/guantanamo-bay-detention-facility-an-overview/>.

⁴ The Guantánamo Docket: Detainees at the prison at Guantánamo Bay - the New York Times. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/guantanamo-bay-detainees.html>.

⁵ 14 June 2023 1. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/terrorism/sr/2023-06-26-SR-terrorism-technical-visit-US-guantanamo-detention-facility.pdf>.

The pattern of mistreatment continues today. Under a January 2025 Executive Order issued by the Trump administration, the use of Guantánamo for immigration detention has been expanded, with more than 700 migrants transferred to the base under conditions that replicate many of the previous abuses, including prolonged solitary confinement.^{6,7} The detentions mark the first time that migrants have been transferred to Guantánamo from the continental United States—a move currently being litigated in U.S. courts by human rights organizations that argue it violates core asylum protections and due process obligations under U.S. and international law.⁹

For these reasons, the expansion of migrant detention at Guantánamo carries an extraordinary moral cost for Americans, compounded by a staggering financial burden as well. According to a joint report by the Departments of Defense and State Inspectors General, this expansion, known as Operation Southern Guard, cost \$60 million between July and December 2025, amounting to roughly \$170,000 per migrant detained at Guantánamo on an annualized basis.¹⁰ Compared to public health programs—where the federal government spends roughly ten and twenty times less per person under Medicaid and Medicare, respectively—the stark disparity lays bare a profound distortion of priorities: the Trump administration’s willingness to devote vast public resources to punitive and cruel policies rather than to investments that benefit the broader public.

In light of this record, the proposal to use Guantánamo to detain Cuban migrants is particularly egregious. It would extend a well-documented pattern of mistreatment toward a population whose displacement is driven significantly by U.S. policy. The nearly 65-year-old embargo has long constrained Cuba’s economy, and the tightening of sanctions under the first Trump administration has deepened a crisis that has persisted since 2021. As a result, more than one million people—over 10 percent of the island’s population—left the country between 2022 and 2023 alone.¹¹

Over the past decade, Cuba’s infant mortality rate, which was the lowest in the hemisphere, more than doubled – increasing by 148 percent, and is worsening due to the impact of blockade-driven shortages on health care.¹² Today, alongside longstanding sanctions, the recent imposition of an ongoing de facto fuel blockade by the Trump administration has led to prolonged blackouts, shortages of food, fuel, and water, and the disruption of essential services—including healthcare and transportation—defining daily life for millions of Cubans. These conditions have pushed the country to the brink of what the United Nations has warned could constitute a “humanitarian collapse,” making a further surge in migration entirely foreseeable.¹³

⁶ “Expanding Migrant Operations Center at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay to Full Capacity.” The White House, January 29, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/expanding-migrant-operations-center-at-naval-station-guantanamo-bay-to-full-capacity/>.

⁷ The journey of a group of Cuban deportees stuck at Guantánamo - The New York Times. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/28/us/politics/cubans-gitmo-deportations.html>.

⁸ Migrants sent to Guantánamo say some detainees tried to kill themselves - The Washington Post. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/02/25/guantanamo-trump-migrants-deportations-venezuela/>.

⁹ Civil rights groups sue to compel Trump admin to release info on detention of immigrants at Guantánamo | Center for Constitutional Rights. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/press-releases/civil-rights-groups-sue-compel-trump-admin-release-info-detention>.

¹⁰ Lead inspector general for overseas contingency operations. Accessed April 28, 2026. https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/highlight_pdf_file/osg_brief_508_final.pdf.

¹¹ Cuba admits to massive emigration wave: A million people left in two years amid crisis. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article290249799.html>.

¹² Systematic review of climate change interventions for improving child health | BMJ paediatrics open. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://bmjpaedsopen.bmj.com/content/10/1/e003415>.

¹³ “Cuba: Un Warns of Possible Humanitarian ‘Collapse’, as Oil Supplies Dwindle | UN News.” United Nations. Accessed April 28, 2026. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2026/02/1166895>.

U.S. policies have deliberately targeted Cuban civilians and contributed to their displacement as well as their deaths. Planning for their detention at Guantánamo is not a response to migration—it is an attempt to contain the consequences of the exact policies that are driving it.

Even more concerning are emerging reports that the Department of Defense is considering potential military action against Cuba.¹⁴ Such action would be unlawful, deeply destabilizing, and catastrophic for the Cuban population, while further increasing displacement, exacerbating mass suffering, and undermining U.S. interests in the region. It must be unequivocally rejected.

We therefore urge you to take the following actions without delay:

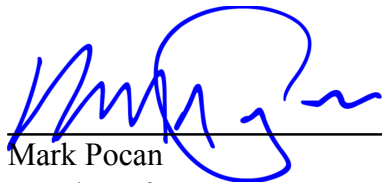
1. Immediately abandon any plans to use Guantánamo Bay for the detention of migrants, including in the event of a surge from Cuba.
2. Suspend Operation Southern Guard and halt all transfers of migrants to Guantánamo, with a view toward permanently closing the facility and returning the land back to the community.
3. Lift the coercive economic measures—including the fuel blockade and related sanctions—that are contributing to the humanitarian crisis in Cuba and driving forced migration.
4. Abandon reported plans for U.S. military action against Cuba.

The United States must not respond to a crisis it is creating with policies that deepen suffering, undermine the rule of law, and repeat the gravest failures of its past—and must finally bring an end, once and for all, to the black hole of violence and torture that Guantánamo has come to represent.

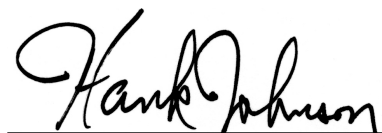
Sincerely,



Delia C. Ramirez
Member of Congress



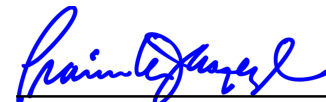
Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Greg Casar
Member of Congress

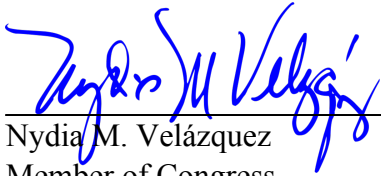


Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress

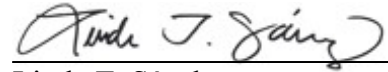


James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

¹⁴ Hjelmggaard, Kim, Rick Jarvis, and Francesca Chambers. "Exclusive: Pentagon Ramps up Planning for Possible Military OPS in Cuba." USA Today, April 16, 2026. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2026/04/15/pentagon-ramps-up-secret-cuba-planning-trump/89623722007/>.



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



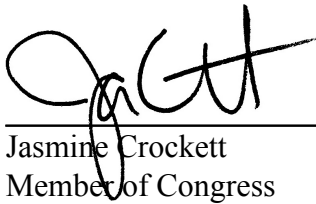
Linda T. Sánchez
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Rashida Tlaib
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Maxwell Alejandro Frost
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Jasmine Crockett
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Jesús G. "Chuy" García
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Ayanna Pressley
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Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
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Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



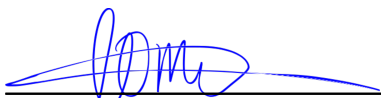
Steve Cohen
Member of Congress



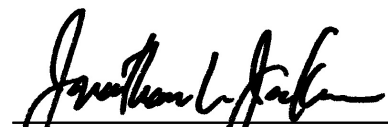
Maxine Waters
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Ilhan Omar
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Dan Goldman
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Jan Schakowsky
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Valerie P. Foushee
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Adelita S. Grijalva
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Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



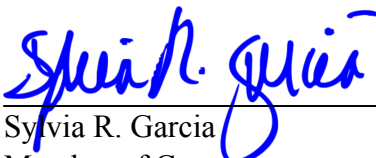
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Summer L. Lee
Member of Congress



Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



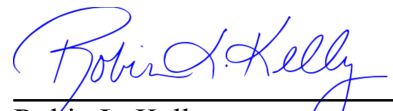
Sylvia R. Garcia
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Maxine Dexter
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Robin L. Kelly
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