

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 29, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

We write to you today seeking your solidarity and support to enter in to the DHS conference committee process with clear eyes. The next 3 weeks we are tasked with operationalizing our values and addressing the fall out caused by a reckless Administration that has put profits before people and rhetoric before the lives of immigrant children.

The Department of Homeland Security is tasked with critical functions. However, under the auspice of the Trump Administration, a number of agencies housed at DHS have abused their authority and the fidelity of public resources. There is a documented pattern of Immigration and Customs Enforcement overspending and abusing the transfer authority to quietly move funds around, a practice that Customs and Border Protection has indicated it would like to replicate. Funds are being reallocated internally not to make our nation safer, but to build desert camps to inhumanely house infants and to prosecute immigrants who are part of the fabric of our community. These agencies have promulgated an agenda driven by hate – not strategy. We call on our colleagues at the negotiating table to adhere to the following guidelines critical to protecting families and children and restoring Americans' faith in government:

Cut, do not increase funding. Stop funding family separation and child detention. A Republican controlled Congress has already sharply increased DHS spending without clear justification. The deal reached by the Conference Committee should not allocate any additional funding to this department or to the ICE and CBP agencies. The upcoming FY2020 budget process will be a critical opportunity to take up conversations about reforms to the agency. In the meantime, not another dollar.

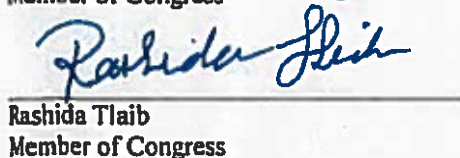
No transfer authority. The Trump Administration continues to use DHS funding as a slush fund (through transfers or reprogramming) to increase detention programs and invest in ineffective policies. The conference committee should prohibit transfers and reprogramming authorities.

Stronger accountability. Strong report language is critical to ensuring safeguards to rein in DHS. However, report language is not enough. The final budget package must be accompanied by stringent oversight mechanisms, and critical obligations should be in statutory text not just report language. DHS has a failed track record of missing Congressional deadlines, including when recently required to report on deaths in custody, list ICE detention facilities, and implement PREA mandated protections against sexual assault in custody. For these reasons, the DHS should be taken up as a separate appropriations bill and accompanied by strong statutory language that saves lives and increases accountability.

As a nation, we need comprehensive immigration reform driven by justice and data. Let us be clear that that process will not play out during the Conference Committee's narrow DHS deliberations. The sole focus of this Conference Committee is to put forward a short-term spending package for 7 months. But a budget is a statement of our values. With the world watching and the lives of families at stake, we should not compromise our values at the negotiating table.

In solidarity,


Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress


Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress


Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress


Alexandria Ocasio Cortez
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress



John McGovern
Member of Congress
