

**HAGERSTOWN
RAPID RESPONSE**

NAACP
Washington County Branch

ACLU
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
FOUNDATION
Maryland

March 5, 2026

Department of Homeland Security,
Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Via email: icesustainability@ice.dhs.gov

RE: Maryland ICE Detention Processing Center and Notice of Proposed Activity in a 100-
to 500-Year Floodplain

We write on behalf of Hagerstown Rapid Response, the Washington County Branch of the NAACP, and the ACLU of Maryland to express our profound concern about the impacts of DHS's rushed plan to convert an empty warehouse at 16220 Wright Road in Williamsport, MD, into a detention camp housing thousands of people each week, **beginning next month**.¹ We understand that DHS's stated goal, as expressed last year by then-Acting ICE Director Tom Homan, is to turn ICE's detention system into something "like Amazon Prime, but with human beings."² Doing that here will create enormous burdens that our local community and environment are simply not equipped to handle—and certainly not at the rapid pace with which DHS is moving.

**DHS HAS FAILED TO SHARE BASIC INFORMATION WITH OUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS DESPITE THE PROJECT'S MASSIVE SCOPE AND REPERCUSSIONS**

Hagerstown Rapid Response is a Washington-County based community group of nearly 500 members concerned about the proposed ICE detention camp in their community. The Washington County NAACP is the local branch of the NAACP, with members throughout Washington County. The ACLU of Maryland is a statewide organization with thousands of members across Maryland, including in the Washington County region.

As organizations representing community members in this area, DHS's proposed actions directly affect our lives, our neighborhoods, our environment, our local infrastructure, and everything else that makes a community. We live and work here. We are raising our families here. Many of us have roots that go back generations, and we hope that future generations will continue that tradition. We have long been active, informed members of our community,

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2026/03/05/ice-detention-warehouses-williamsport/> (citing a federal official briefed on the plan noting it is expected to open next month).

² <https://azmirror.com/2025/04/08/ice-director-envisions-amazon-like-mass-deportation-system-prime-but-with-human-beings/>

engaging with all levels of our local and state government. We are deeply invested in both the immediate and long-term well-being of our community and our environment.

That is why we are so deeply disturbed that DHS has provided local officials no concrete proposals or details about its plan to transform an empty, 830,000 square foot warehouse into a detention camp. **DHS has not provided a site plan, or any kind of plan at all, nor otherwise consulted with the relevant government bodies here about how any of this will work.** DHS did not inform local governments before purchasing the site, let alone discuss potential impacts or how the agency’s plans might be informed by Washington County’s Comprehensive Master Plan for development.³ There are no public documents showing the proposed layout of this specific detention camp, anything about operations, or how DHS plans to carry out the work needed to transform a low occupancy building designed as a warehouse into a large-scale detention center with rapid and non-stop turnover.

To the extent DHS has made any representations about this specific project, they have been so general as to invite more questions than answers. The little information provided in the purported floodplain notice is, sadly, consistent with this overall pattern of failing to provide concrete, accurate information. (For example, despite the obvious fact that the property was purchased two months ago, the notice falsely characterizes this as a *prospective* purchase. Similarly, although the changes will plainly result in dramatically higher sewage volume and clearly exceeds existing capacity, the notice completely glosses over this, claiming only that “limited” upgrades “may” be required.)

Nor can we ignore the extensive public reporting about ICE’s handling of other facilities, whether already in operation or yet-to-be-built, such as the “Alligator Alcatraz” camp sited in the Florida Everglades, or the proposed Social Circle, Georgia detention camp. There are consistent reports about DHS’s failure to follow longstanding environmental or other laws,⁴ formulaic and factually unsupported claims of minimal local impact without any actual assessment or involvement of local officials,⁵ and disturbing conditions within detention

³ <https://www.washco-md.net/planning-zoning/comp-plan-2040/> (“This long-range strategic document will serve as the blueprint for the County’s growth, development, and preservation efforts over the next 20 years. The 2040 Comprehensive Plan was developed after years of research, public engagement, and stakeholder input. It ... addresses key areas such as land use, housing, transportation, economic development, natural resources, infrastructure, and community services.”).

⁴ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/judge-hears-evidence-environmental-concerns-alligator-alcatraz-rcna223356>

⁵ See, for example, the statement of local officials in Social Circle, Georgia, describing specific misrepresentations by DHS and noting: “In documents supplied to the City by DHS, it is stated that the facility will have ‘no adverse effect on the community and surrounding properties.’ The City contends that the information provided is insufficient in fully answering our questions and does not adequately support the conclusion that the surrounding area would not be impacted.”).

<https://www.socialcirclega.gov/Home/Components/News/News/241/16>

centers affecting the health and safety of the community at large, like a recent measles outbreak in Texas.⁶

Against this backdrop, inviting “public comment” on an obscure website that people in our community don’t even know about with *five-business-day* turnaround for a facility DHS plans to open next month is completely illusory. This is not good faith notice and it is not consultation. It is a sham that makes a mockery of the public notice process, revealing just how little the federal government cares about what our community needs.

THE VOLUME OF DETAINEES CYCLING THROUGH THE FACILITY COULD EXCEED OUR ENTIRE COUNTY’S POPULATION

Based on the limited information that has been shared publicly, DHS has indicated its intention is to operate this warehouse as a massive processing site, with a capacity for 1,500 people detained for 3-7 days before being transferred elsewhere to another DHS facility or deported out of the country. No information has been provided about whether DHS intends to use this detention camp for families and children, in addition to adults.

Taking DHS at its word, an astonishing number of people will be rapidly churned through this detention camp: Between 78,000 and 182,500 people each year. Each person will need to be transported in, detained, and transported out. Furthermore, DHS has not in any way bound itself to this 1,500-bed capacity. Compared to other sites and assuming, as we must, that DHS/ICE will use a layout similar to other facilities, the gargantuan 830,000 square foot site all but invites DHS to double or triple the number of detainees it seeks to move through the space.⁷ In addition, of course, a detention camp of this scale involves significant staffing requirements – correctional officers, administrators, medical providers, security staff, food and laundry services, and more—but, again DHS has not provided any actual analysis or estimates of the number of people, types of vehicles or other transport that will be involved.

To put the scale of this plan in context, the town of Williamsport is immediately adjacent to the site. Williamsport’s total population is 1,950 people.⁸ Hagerstown, the largest city in the area, has a total population of 43,500 people.⁹ Washington County’s population is estimated to be 157,000 people spread over 467 square miles.¹⁰ **In other words, over the course of a year, DHS is proposing to detain a total population equivalent to that of the entire county within its 54-acre facility.**

⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ice-confirms-measles-outbreak-nations-largest-detention-facility-texas-rcna261659>.

⁷ For example, the proposed detention center in Social Circle, Georgia is just 200,000 square feet larger, and slated for 9,500 people.

⁸ <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US2485100-williamsport-md/>

⁹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hagerstowncitymaryland/INC110224>

¹⁰ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/washingtoncountymaryland/PST045224>

DHS'S PLAN WILL COMPLETELY OVERWHELM OUR LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Obviously, without specific plans or proposals it is virtually impossible for local community members and officials to understand or address concretely what this vast undertaking and detention program means for our local community or environment. That said, one does not need special knowledge to realize that the detention camp will add tremendous, unprecedented activity and burdens to the local community, our environment, and our infrastructure.

For example, DHS has not produced any plans or information to our local government officials about where these people will be coming from, nor its plans for transporting this many people to and from the site. Our understanding from news reports regarding other detention sites is that DHS will seek to operate the site as a hub for a large region, bringing people from multiple states to our small community to be detained. But the closest highway, I-81, is already stretched beyond its capacity, and has been for years, and I-70 is similarly burdened. Longstanding plans to expand I-81 have been repeatedly deferred, and a proposed construction schedule does not begin work until 2027—at which point only two lanes of the four-lane highway will be open in each direction.¹¹ Our small airport, Hagerstown Regional Airport, has very limited capacity. Wright Road itself narrows right in front of the facility, and there have been rumors that there will be other road rerouting required for the detention camp to be operational. And all this additional traffic and congestion increases the number of car or truck accidents and compromises air quality.

Equally important, Hagerstown's City Administrator last year observed that “[t]here's no bigger issue” in the region than its strained water supply.¹² Hagerstown provides much of the County's water, including water for the detention camp site. But the City's water treatment plant was built in 1928 and is badly in need of repair. According to a recent government assessment, its “primary lines are fragile and too small to handle increased volumes of water,” and other distribution lines can't handle more flow because they are “operating at maximum pressure.”¹³ Also significant, the City has an extremely limited backup water supply of less than one day of existing usage in the event the 100-year-old water plant breaks down. DHS has not provided any estimate or information to City officials about expected usage at the detention camp site, which, as a warehouse, is currently allocated about 800 gallons a day.¹⁴ **But city officials wrestling with how to prepare in the absence of information have estimated a range of between 75,000 to 150,000 gallons per day, or**

¹¹ <https://www.heraldmillmedia.com/story/news/local/2026/01/28/maryland-transportation-plan-includes-widening-interstate-81/88300816007/>

¹² <https://www.heraldmillmedia.com/story/news/local/2023/04/28/hagerstown-and-washington-county-meet-to-plan-areas-water-needs-maryland-utilities-budgeting/70158985007/>

¹³ <https://www.heraldmillmedia.com/story/news/local/2023/04/28/hagerstown-and-washington-county-meet-to-plan-areas-water-needs-maryland-utilities-budgeting/70158985007/>

¹⁴ The property has a two-inch domestic service line and a 10-inch fire line.

<https://localnews1.org/hagerstown-outlines-water-allocation-process-for-ice-facility/>

27,375,000 to 54,750,000 gallons per year—at least 100 times the current allocation. To accommodate this volume, the water lines at the site would also need to be overhauled. As a matter of local law, any proposed change is supposed to involve six-month notice. None has been provided.

These are just examples of our genuine concerns about what is looming over our community. There are many others – how will DHS/ICE handle the massive increase in sewage? How will our emergency services handle the extremely predictable increase in emergency events at the detention camp, like fires or other emergencies? Will our already understaffed emergency services lose more staff to DHS? What will all the increased activity mean for Semple Creek and the waterways that flow into the Potomac? Will the town of Williamsport, peppered with history and charm and which relies on tourism as its primary industry, suffer economic and other impacts? For the residents who live across the street from the detention camp, how will the 24-hour floodlights affect their daily lives? What will it mean for the childcare center with a playground across the street, or the nearby schools and senior center?

In sum, our federal government is supposed to work with us when it is proposing massive, permanent changes that will have decades-long impacts on a local community. In the absence of any concrete information or consultation with all relevant state and local officials, we strongly oppose any further steps towards developing this site.