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November 12, 2019

Acting Director Matthew T. Albence  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
500 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW, Mail Stop 5003  
Washington, DC 20536-5003

Dear Acting Director Albence:

We write to express our concerns over the death of Mr. Nebane Abienwi, a 37-year-old asylum seeker from Cameroon who died in the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on October 1, 2019. We seek information about the circumstances that led to his death including why he was taken off life support against his family's wishes. We urge ICE to complete a full investigation.

Mr. Abienwi arrived at the San Ysidro Port of Entry on September 5, 2019, requesting asylum. On September 19, 2019, he was sent to the Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, California. According to an ICE press release, "after experiencing a hypertensive event in the middle of the night," he was transported to the Sharp Chula Medical Center on September 26, 2019, and later died undergoing treatment for a brain hemorrhage.

First and foremost, we ask that you work closely with the coroner's office and Mr. Abienwi's family to ensure his body is released in a timely fashion for a proper burial. We also request that ICE complete a full investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Abienwi's death and provide a report to his family and our offices. At the very least, ICE must endeavor to preserve any and all documentation, including surveillance footage, that would prove useful in future investigations.

We reject the flawed perception that immigrants to the United States are comprised of a particular racial group or come from a particular part of the world. We also reject the assumption that U.S. immigration policy only affects specific communities. The reality is that our U.S. immigration policy has profound impacts on the Black community, and the continued anti-immigrant agenda of this administration has been particularly harmful to our communities.

According to the Pew Research Center, there are 4.2 million Black immigrants in the United States. Black immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America make positive contributions to the United States, but they are at a higher risk for

arrest, detention, and abuse because of racial profiling and racial bias. There have been numerous reports that immigrants from Sudan, Somalia, Cameroon, Kenya, and other African and African diaspora countries have experienced extreme physical, verbal, and mental abuse at the hands of government employees and federal contractors. The degree and persistence of this abuse stems from a culture in which the lives, safety, and security of Black immigrants are devalued.

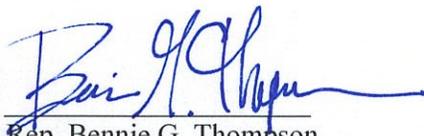
Unfortunately, there seems to be a pattern of mistreatment of Black immigrants in ICE custody, part of a trend in which the lives of Black immigrants are steeped in a system of institutionalized racism. The treatment of Black immigrants is morally reprehensible, and we call on you to ensure that immigrants, Black or otherwise, are no longer subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment.

We look forward to your prompt response to our requests. To follow up on this letter, please contact Exodie Roe, Policy Director for the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), at [Exodie.RoeIII@mail.house.gov](mailto:Exodie.RoeIII@mail.house.gov). Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Rep. Karen Bass  
Chair, CBC



Rep. Bennie G. Thompson  
Chair, Committee on Homeland Security



Rep. Yvette D. Clarke  
Chair, CBC Immigration Task Force