

# THE TOXIC TRUTH

Organizing Against Migrant Child Detention, Militarism, and Environmental Racism in Homestead, Florida



65-69  
Decibels  
levels due to F-16 jets

**WE DEMAND**

-  Comprehensive soil, groundwater, and air sampling at the detention camp site, including dormitories, outdoor play areas, and buses.
-  A Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA) that takes into account child residents and an exposure scenario that includes time in tents and outdoors and in the event of flooding.
-  A Human Health Risk Assessment (HHRA) based on children residents.

**TO LEARN MORE**  
Federal Justice and Environmental Justice require healthy and environmental justice center

 EARTHJUSTICE  American Friends Service Committee

The center located near 16 sources of contamination



American Friends Service Committee



EARTHJUSTICE



# The Toxic Truth: Organizing Against Migrant Child Detention, Militarism, and Environmental Racism in Homestead, Florida

**Co-Authored by American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and Earthjustice**

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*Cover artwork features a photograph by Armando Carrada; migrant youth protesting environmental violence at the Homestead detention camp in 2021.*

*Back cover features photograph by Lis-Marie Alvarado; mass rally demanding the closure of the detention center in 2019.*

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Youth organizers with the American Friends Service Committee of Florida visit Washington, D.C., to demand an end to child detention, 2019. Photographer: Lis-Marie Alvarado.

# FOREWORD

Between 2016 and 2019, thousands of migrant children were detained at the Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Alien Children in Homestead, Florida. Some children detained in Homestead arrived at the border without a parent or legally recognized guardian. Others were forcibly separated from their families by the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policies.

While open, the Homestead detention camp was the largest detention facility for children in the United States and was the only private, for-profit detention facility for children in the country. The detention camp was directly adjacent to the Homestead Air Reserve Base, a military base, and to a contaminated Superfund site.



In 2018 and 2019, the American Friends Service Committee of Florida (AFSC) led a coalition to shut down the detention camp in Homestead and end all child detention. As part of our campaign, we collaborated with researchers and lawyers from Earthjustice to document environmental conditions at the Homestead detention camp.

Our research revealed that conditions at the camp posed potentially serious threats to the health and safety of children detained there. These dangers included possible exposure to toxic chemicals including arsenic, lead, mercury, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and trichloroethene from a military nearby Superfund site.<sup>1</sup> Exposure to these toxicants is particularly harmful to children and is linked to developmental damage, cancer, damage to the kidneys, liver, heart, and immune system and anemia, among many other serious and irreversible health effects.<sup>2</sup> Children detained at the camp were also

**RESEARCH REVEALED  
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HEALTH AND SAFETY OF  
CHILDREN DETAINED  
THERE.**

exposed to noise from military jets taking off and landing at the Homestead Air Reserve Base runway at levels associated with developmental harm.

We demanded that the agencies responsible—the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Air Force—immediately conduct environmental testing to determine whether the facility was safe for children. As of the publication of this report, we have received no evidence that they have done so.

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1 Air Force Civil Engineer Center for the Environmental Protection Agency, *Third Five-Year Review (FYR) Report for CERCLA Sites: SS034/OU-20, SS035/OU-21, OT022/OU-26, OT024/OU-28, OT026/OU-29, SS040/OU-30, and SS042/OU-31, Former Homestead Air Force Base (BRAC) Miami-Dade County, Homestead, Florida USEPA ID No. FL7570024037* (September 2016) (OUs 20, 21, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31 are contaminated with arsenic; OUs 26, 28, 29 are contaminated with lead; OUs 26, 28, 30, 31 are contaminated with PAH; OU 26 is contaminated with trichloroethene and mercury).

2 Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Lead – ToxFAQs* (August 2020), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts13.pdf>; ATSDR, *Arsenic – ToxFAQs* (August 2007), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/TSP/substances/ToxSubstance.aspx?toxid=3>; ATSDR, *What Health Effects Are Associated With PAH Exposure?*, [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health\\_effects.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health_effects.html); Chiu, et al., *Human Health Effects of Trichloroethylene: Key Findings and Scientific Issues*, 121(3) *Environmental Health Perspective* 303-311 (2013); ATSDR, *Mercury – ToxFAQs* (April 1999), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts46.pdf>.

Our coalition organized protests, marches, and petitions to demand the closure of the detention camp and the reunification of detained children with their waiting families and loved ones. We urged our elected representatives to end *all* migrant detention and honor the human right to mobility and refuge. In June of 2019, presidential candidates of the Democratic party joined us to protest at the gates of the detention camp. Then Senator Kamala Harris called for the camp to be shut down immediately. More than a year of sustained organizing led to the successful closure of the camp in October 2019.

Yet in February of 2021, the Biden administration announced plans to reopen the detention camp, renamed the Biscayne Influx Care Facility.<sup>3</sup> No environmental testing was conducted before planning began to reopen the facility. AFSC again protested against child detention and advocated to keep the detention camp in Homestead closed. These efforts included sending a letter with Earthjustice to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department

of Health and Human Services (HHS), and other federal agencies, outlining the known environmental hazards at Homestead, calling on them to keep the facility closed, and requesting environmental testing.<sup>4</sup>

This report documents dangerous environmental conditions at the detention camp in Homestead and reflects on our campaign to end child detention and for environmental and migrant justice. It demonstrates that the detention camp at Homestead is an unsafe place for children and demands an immediate investigation into toxic and noise exposures. It is the result of a two-year collaboration between community organizers, environmental justice lawyers, and researchers exploring every possible way to challenge migrant detention and shut down the camp. It features the artwork of youth activists engaged in organizing against the camp and demanding the freedom of all youth. We hope that it will provide an example of the power and possibility of collaborative research and organizing.

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3 Monique O. Madan and Alex Daugherty, "Exclusive: Homestead detention center for unaccompanied migrant teens to reopen under Biden," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 23, 2021. Available at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/article249449265.html>.

4 Letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families, and the Environmental Protection Agency titled "Demand for Moratorium on Plans to House Unaccompanied Minors at the Homestead Detention Center / Biscayne Influx Care Facility and Immediate Need for Environmental Testing and Health Risk Assessment." Signed by Dominique Burkhardt (Earthjustice), Laura Arroyo (Earthjustice), Guadalupe de la Cruz (AFSC), Lis-Marie Alvarado (AFSC), Mariana Martinez (AFSC) and Emma Shaw Crane (NYU). Sent March 24th, 2021.



But while our efforts have been successful in preventing the camp from reopening, there is much more work to do. Today we are now working to keep the detention camp permanently closed—and to ensure that no one is detained in Homestead ever again. In October 2021, we filed a lawsuit against the Air Force, Department of Homeland Security, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement compelling a response to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for records of environmental contamination and testing at Homestead.

This facility must not be used for *any* purpose until comprehensive environmental testing is complete. We must continue our collective struggle to end the detention and incarceration of immigrant children—and work to build safer, more just futures for all people.

Signed,

Guadalupe de la Cruz  
American Friends  
Service Committee - Florida

Emma Shaw Crane  
Columbia University

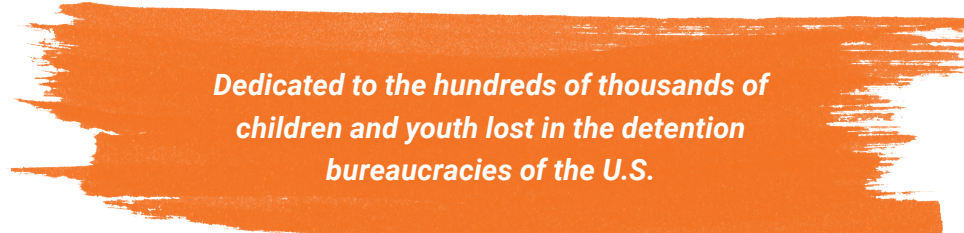
Lis-Marie Alvarado  
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American Friends  
Service Committee - Florida

Laura Arroyo  
Earthjustice - Florida Regional Office

Ana Correa  
Earthjustice - Florida Regional Office



*Dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of  
children and youth lost in the detention  
bureaucracies of the U.S.*



Princesa Gamino, "An Abrupt Time in a Young Life"

# HISTORY OF THE HOMESTEAD DETENTION CAMP





**Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Children, 2019.** Photographer: Guadalupe de la Cruz.

The Homestead detention camp was once part of the Homestead Air Force Base. In 1990, parts of the Air Force Base were placed on the Superfund National Priorities List.<sup>5</sup> In 1992, Hurricane Andrew destroyed much of the base. After the hurricane, the Air Force base underwent a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process and nearly two-thirds of the former base was transferred to Miami-Dade County and other government agencies. In 1996,

the land that is now the detention camp was transferred to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).<sup>6</sup>

The Department of Labor used the land to open a Job Corps campus, a federal program that offers vocational training to youth. The Job Corp program was managed by ResCare, a private contractor. In 2015, a Job Corps student, José Amaya Guardado, the son of refugees from El Salvador, was murdered

5 The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as the Superfund program, requires the federal government to clean up toxic contamination that is dangerous to public health or the environment. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assesses these environmental hazards and oversees clean-up.

6 Department of Labor, "Request for Transfer of Excess Real and Related Personal Property," Attachment #1, Item B: 52. June 29th, 1994.

on the Homestead campus. ResCare was found negligent and the Job Corps program in Homestead was closed.

Following the closure of the Job Corps program, the Department of Labor signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Health and Human Services to use the site for the detention of migrant children. In 2016, the Obama administration reopened the former Job Corps campus as an “emergency influx shelter” for hundreds of migrant and refugee children. The Trump administration briefly closed the detention camp in 2017 but reopened it in March of 2018.<sup>7</sup> Children held in detention in Homestead doubled from 1,570 in June of 2018 to 3,234 in March of 2019. By April of 2019, there were 3,728 children detained in Homestead.<sup>8</sup>

The detention camp was governed by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) but administered by Comprehensive Health Services, Inc., a subsidiary of Caliburn International LLC,



Ana Morales, “Will We Ever Be Free?”

a private military contractor owned by DC Capital Partners.<sup>9</sup> They charged between \$750 and \$775 dollars per day per child.<sup>10</sup>

Children detained at the U.S. border without a parent or legal guardian are considered “unaccompanied” by U.S. law. Unaccompanied children may be legally detained for up to 72 hours by the Department of Homeland Security

7 Patricia Mazzei, “What It’s Like To Tour a Children’s Detention Facility,” *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/us/detention-center-children.html>. June 18, 2018.

8 Center for Constitutional Law, “Facility Report for Flores vs. Barr Class Council: Homestead.” May 31st, 2019: 64.

9 The American Friends Service Committee, 2019. “The corporate interests behind the Homestead migrant youth detention center.” Available at: <https://investigate.afsc.org/updates/homestead-detention-center>.

10 Congressional Hearing, 116 Congress. “The Trump Administration’s Child Separation Policy: Substantiated Allegations of Mistreatment,” July 12, 2019. Serial No. 116-46. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-116hhrg37315/html/CHRG-116hhrg37315.htm>. Accessed October 21, 2019.





**Javier Gamino, “Penalty for Living”**

at a Customs and Border Patrol facility and then are transferred into the “care and custody” of ORR. ORR is housed within the Administration for Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services. When the number of detained children exceeds the capacity of permanent and licensed ORR shelters, they may be placed in “emergency

influx” shelters like the detention camp in Homestead. An “influx” or “overflow” facility means youth are detained there only when other, permanent youth detention facilities are at capacity. Influx facilities are not subject to state or local licensing or health and safety standards, which means that care for children in Homestead was not regulated and the

## **HOMESTEAD AVOIDED HAVING TO COMPLY WITH THE FEDERAL FLORES AGREEMENT—WHICH SPECIFIES THAT CHILDREN CANNOT BE HELD IN DETENTION FACILITIES FOR MORE THAN 20 DAYS.**

facility was not licensed to care for children.<sup>11</sup>

The children detained in Homestead were mainly from Central America. Roughly 55% of all the children detained in Homestead were from Guatemala and the rest were from Honduras and El Salvador.<sup>12</sup> Children from Guatemala are

consistently the largest group of young migrants entering the United States.<sup>13</sup>

Children from Guatemala are also disproportionately Indigenous Maya, and many speak only Indigenous languages. Though children who do not speak fluent Spanish are supposed to be placed in smaller facilities, Indigenous children who spoke only Mam, Q'eqchi, K'iche were detained at Homestead.<sup>14</sup> Social workers and guards employed at the detention camp, as in other facilities across the country, were unable to communicate with many Indigenous children, further increasing their risk for mistreatment, separation from family members, and inadequate medical treatment.<sup>15</sup> Across the United States, the children

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11 Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Children Entering the United States Unaccompanied: Guide to Terms," Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/policy-guidance/children-entering-united-states-unaccompanied-guide-terms#Influx%20Care%20Facility>. March 21, 2016.

12 A lawsuit filed against the detention camp states that roughly 55 percent of children processed through the camp were from Guatemala, about 27 percent were from Honduras, and 14 percent were from El Salvador. See Center for Constitutional Law, "Facility Report for Flores vs. Barr Class Council: Homestead," May 24th, 2019: 63.

13 U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, "Stats and Summaries: FY 2000 to FY 2019," Available at: <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/media-resources/stats>. Though the U.S. Border Patrol does not make the ethnicity of detained children publicly available, 95% of migrant children deported from Mexico and the United States to Guatemala are Indigenous Maya (Guatemalan Secretary of Social Welfare, cited in Lauren Heidbrink, "The Coercive Power of Debt: Migration and Deportation of Guatemalan Indigenous Youth," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 24(1), March 2019: 265.

14 Center for Constitutional Law, "Facility Report for Flores vs. Barr Class Council: Homestead." May 31, 2019: 41. See also "Facility Report for Flores vs. Barr Class Council, Exhibit 7: Declaration of Dr. Ryan Matlow," May 28, 2019: 86.

15 Americans for Immigrant Justice, "Do My Rights Matter? The Mistreatment of Unaccompanied Children in CBP Custody," Available at: <https://aijustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Do-My-Rights-Matter-The-Mistreatment-of-Unaccompanied-Children-in-CBP-Custody.pdf>. October 2020: 16-25.

and youth who die in detention are disproportionately Indigenous Maya.<sup>16</sup>

Detained children ranged from ages 13 to 17 and spent an average of 67 days at the camp.<sup>17</sup> Because of its classification as an “emergency temporary influx shelter” the detention center in Homestead avoided having to comply with the federal Flores Agreement—which specifies that children cannot be held in detention facilities for more than 20 days. A boy from Guatemala was detained at the camp the longest, 122 days; a girl from Guatemala, 119 days.<sup>18</sup> The camp was not regulated by the state of Florida, nor was it certified or inspected by local authorities. Elected and appointed officials were repeatedly denied entrance to the camp.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the environmental violence that this report documents, children detained at the camp were exposed to crowding, rampant sexual abuse, and the trauma of prolonged separation from their families and communities.<sup>20</sup> Children who turned 18 inside the facility were transported to adult detention facilities including nearby Krome. An unknown number of children were deported before they could be placed with their waiting families.

One of the most challenging aspects of our research was understanding who was responsible for environmental conditions at the detention camp. The detention camp was built on former military land owned by the Department of Labor, was managed by the Office

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16 Jakelín Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin, a seven-year old Maya Q'eqchi' girl, died of sepsis related to a bacterial infection after she was refused timely medical attention in a Customs and Border Control detention facility at the border. Felipe Gómez Alonso, an eight-year old Maya Chuj boy, died of the flu on Christmas Eve of 2018 in Customs and Border Patrol custody. Carlos Hernández, a sixteen-year old Maya Achi boy, died of influenza in a Border Patrol facility in 2019. Juan de León Gutiérrez, a sixteen-year old Maya Ch'orti' boy, died in Health and Human Services custody after symptoms related to an untreated puffy tumor in his frontal lobe were not adequately treated. For example, see The Mayan League, “Indigenous Children Are Dying At the U.S. Mexico Border.” May 16, 2019. Available at: [https://issuu.com/mayanleague.org/docs/indigenous\\_children\\_dying\\_at\\_the\\_bo](https://issuu.com/mayanleague.org/docs/indigenous_children_dying_at_the_bo).

17 John Burnett, “Inside the Largest and Most Controversial Shelter for Migrant Children in the U.S.,” *National Public Radio*. February 13, 2019. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/13/694138106/inside-the-largest-and-most-controversial-shelter-for-migrant-children-in-the-u->.

18 Miriam Jordan, “Migrant Children are Spending ‘Months’ Crammed in a Temporary Migrant Shelter,” *The New York Times*, June 26, 2019. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/26/us/homestead-migrant-children-shelter.html>.

19 Jerry Ianelli, “Lawmakers Denied Entry to Miami Compound Holding 1,000 Child Migrants,” *The New Times*, June 19, 2018. Available at: <https://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/video-miami-child-migrant-compound-denies-nelson-wasserman-schultz-entry-10454112>.

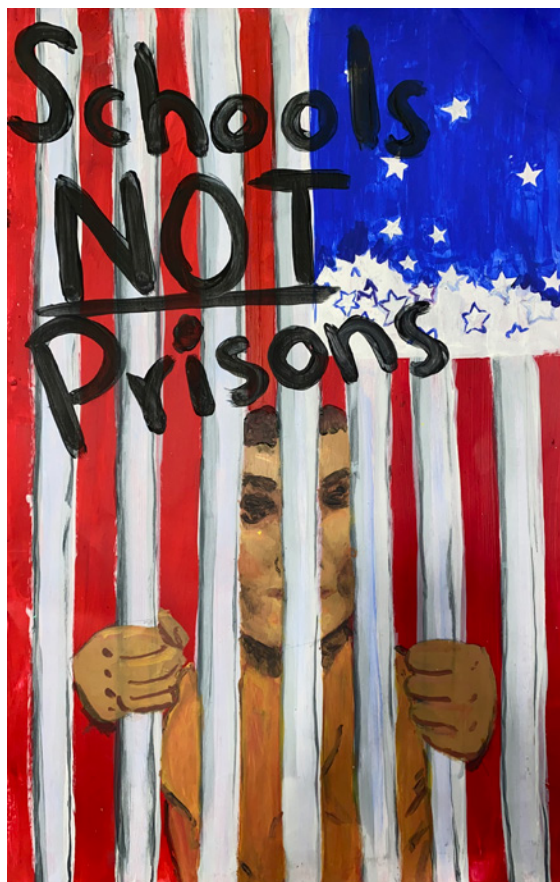
20 Amnesty International, “No Home for Children: End the Contract To Operate the Homestead ‘Temporary Emergency’ Facility,” July 17, 2019. Available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/no-home-for-children-us-government-detention-of-children-at-homestead-facility-cruel-and-unlawful/>.



of Refugee Resettlement, a division of the Administration for Children and Families, which is part of the Department of Health and Human Services, and was administered by a private military contractor, Caliburn International. Remediation at the military Superfund sites that surround the detention camp is monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) but carried out by the United States Air Force. The convoluted jurisdiction of the detention camp made it difficult to hold any single organization or entity responsible.

This report is based on publicly available documents from the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Labor, and Miami-Dade County. With support from Earthjustice, AFSC filed a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for further information. To date, the FOIA request to the Air Force—the agency we believe has key environmental records sought—has not been fulfilled. We also have not received a response from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The burden of proof with respect to health and safety of children at the detention camp belongs to the



**Ilse Moreno, “Schools Not Prisons”**

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the government agency responsible for the care of detained children. Following the letter we sent to HHS and other federal officials in March 2021 outlining the known environmental hazards at Homestead, HHS officials cannot claim to be unaware of the health and safety risks. Yet the Biden Administration has not publicly rescinded its plans to reopen Homestead and as far as we know, environmental testing has not taken place at the site.



Youth protesting the Biden administration's announcement that the Homestead camp would be reopened, 2021. Photographer: Armando Carrada.

# ONGOING EFFORTS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION

**A** FSC partnered with Earthjustice to file a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests seeking additional information about environmental conditions at the detention camp.

In 2019, we submitted FOIA requests to the U.S. Air Force, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Health and Human Services. In 2020, we submitted a FOIA request to the Environmental

Protection Agency (EPA). Our request to the Department of Homeland Security was transferred to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The EPA, Department of Labor, and Department of Health and Human Services responded to our FOIA requests; however, they did not have in their possession the types of records pertaining to environmental conditions or testing that we requested.

According to the EPA, the Air Force—and not the EPA—would have more extensive records of environmental contamination and testing at or near the detention camp, because the Air Force has jurisdiction over its own environmental matters. Yet, after two years, the FOIA request to the Air Force remains unanswered, despite numerous follow-ups.<sup>21</sup> To date, we have not received a response from the Air Force, the Department of Homeland Security, or ICE. Moreover, we have not seen any evidence of environmental testing at the site of the detention camp.<sup>22</sup>

This lack of transparency is deeply concerning and in violation of the FOIA statute's requirement that agencies respond within 20 business days to a records request. The failure to respond within legally mandated time limits places a burden on communities and advocates, who are left without access to crucial information.

Because key federal agencies have been evading their duty to respond to our FOIA requests, in October 2021, we filed suit against the Air Force, the Department of Homeland Security, and ICE seeking a court order compelling their responses to our requests.

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21 Letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families, and the Environmental Protection Agency titled "Demand for Moratorium on Plans to House Unaccompanied Minors at the Homestead Detention Center / Biscayne Influx Care Facility and Immediate Need for Environmental Testing and Health Risk Assessment," Exhibit B: FOIA Request Dated 07/26/2019.

22 Letter to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Administration for Children and Families, and the Environmental Protection Agency titled "Demand for Moratorium on Plans to House Unaccompanied Minors at the Homestead Detention Center / Biscayne Influx Care Facility and Immediate Need for Environmental Testing and Health Risk Assessment." Signed by Dominique Burkhardt (Earthjustice), Laura Arroyo (Earthjustice), Guadalupe de la Cruz (AFSC), Lis-Marie Alvarado (AFSC), Mariana Martinez (AFSC) and Emma Shaw Crane (NYU). Sent March 24th, 2021.

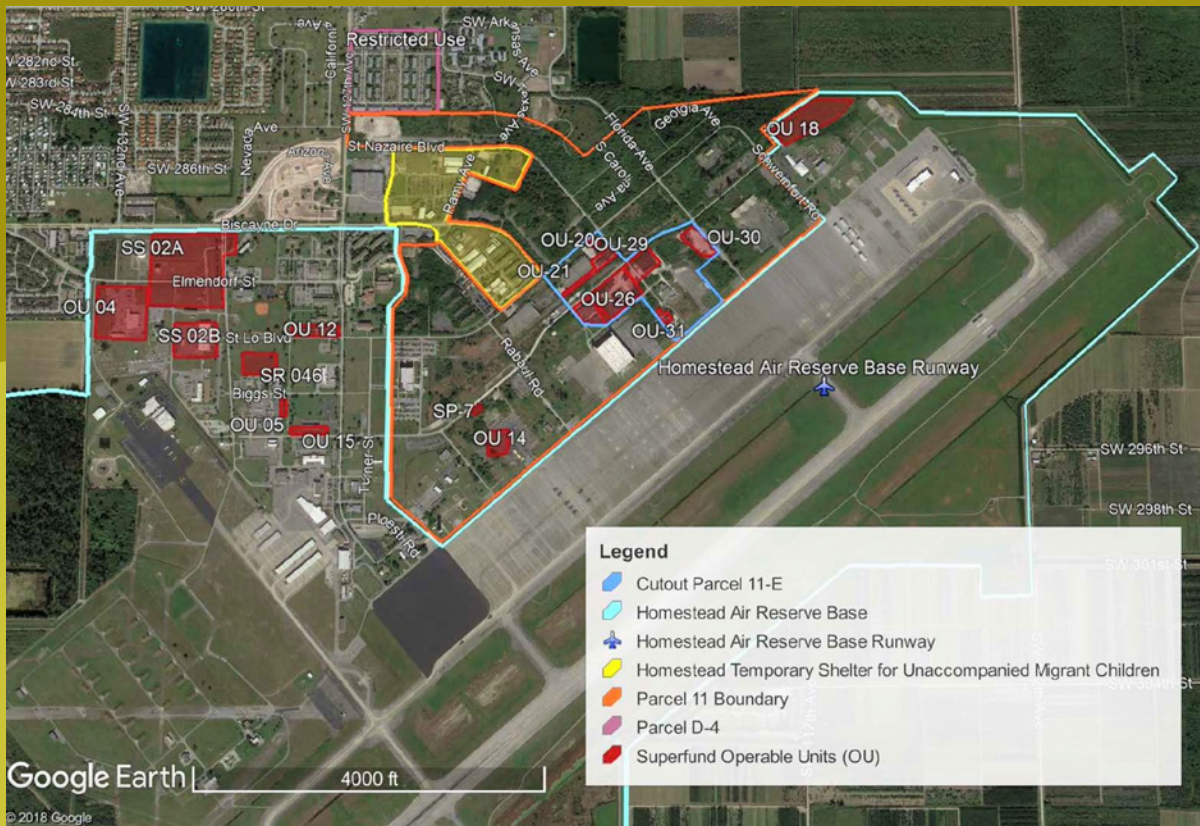


# REPORT FINDINGS

## The Superfund Site

Based on publicly available information, the Homestead detention camp is directly adjacent

to what is the Homestead Air Force Base National Priority Superfund site. The camp is within 2/3 of a mile of 16



**Superfund OUs (shaded red) near the Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors (shaded yellow).**

Map by Jim Brinkman, expert in the field of environmental remediation. The map was created by layering information from Environmental Protection Agency and Miami-Dade County reports with a map of the detention camp and military base.<sup>‡</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> Environmental Protection Agency, "HWSA [Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments] Corrective Action Permit Renewal Application," Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida. February 2016: 25 and Clerk of the Court, Miami-Dade County. September 30th, 2004. "Indenture between the United States of America and Miami-Dade County Regarding Parcel D-4," CFN 2005R0212582, Recorded 03/03/2005, Harvey Ruvin, Clerk of the Court, Miami-Dade County, Florida. Page 5.

sources of contamination, known as Operable Units, or “OUs.”<sup>23</sup> These OUs became contaminated after military use for the storage of hazardous materials, including munitions and industrial waste, and for aircraft maintenance, testing, and disposal.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reported in 2016 that these OUs are “located in an unpopulated area, with no residences located on the site or nearby.”<sup>24</sup> But these sites are in fact directly adjacent to the detention camp, where thousands of migrant children lived, studied, played, and received medical care. As of 2021, this Superfund site is still contaminated and is “not yet ready” for reuse and redevelopment.<sup>25</sup> As far as we know, no testing has taken place at the site of the detention camp.

The proximity of these known contaminated sites to the Homestead detention camp poses a threat to the children who lived there while indefinitely detained. Testing and analysis of the groundwater, soil, surface water, and air quality at the Homestead detention center site is critically important to determine if it is a safe place for children to live.

## Contaminants and Potential Exposure

The cluster of OUs closest to the detention camp are contaminated with arsenic, lead, mercury, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), and trichloroethene.<sup>26</sup> These contaminants can cause cancer; damage to the kidneys, liver, and immune system;

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23 The American Friends Service Committee, *Health At Risk Potential Toxic and Noise Exposure Endangering Children at the Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Migrant Children* (2019).. Appendix A maps and describes the 16 OUs closest to the Homestead Detention center (data compiled from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Public Health Assessment for Homestead Air Force Base, Homestead AFB, Dade County, Florida, Cerclis No. FL7570024037* (Sept. 30, 1998) and AGEISS, Inc., HSWA Corrective Action Permit Renewal Application, Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida EPA (February 2016).

24 Air Force Civil Engineer Center for the Environmental Protection Agency, *Third Five-Year Review (FYR) Report for CERCLA Sites: SS034/OU-20, SS035/OU-21, OT022/OU-26, OT024/OU-28, OT026/OU-29, SS040/OU-30, and SS042/OU-31, Former Homestead Air Force Base (BRAC) Miami-Dade County, Homestead, Florida USEPA ID No. FL7570024037* (2016: xvi).

25 Environmental Protection Agency, “Homestead Air Force Base Cleanup Progress,” Available at: <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.schedule&id=0404746>.

26 Air Force Civil Engineer Center for the Environmental Protection Agency, *Third Five-Year Review (FYR) Report for CERCLA Sites: SS034/OU-20, SS035/OU-21, OT022/OU-26, OT024/OU-28, OT026/OU-29, SS040/OU-30, and SS042/OU-31, Former Homestead Air Force Base (BRAC) Miami-Dade County, Homestead, Florida USEPA ID No. FL7570024037* (September 2016) (OUs 20, 21, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31 are contaminated with arsenic; OUs 26, 28, 29 are contaminated with lead; OUs 26, 28, 30, 31 are contaminated with PAH; OU 26 is contaminated with trichloroethene and mercury).



**At Homestead Detention Center, children can spend weeks, even months in custody, which can cause lasting trauma and incalculable costs to children, families, and our communities.** Photo in the public domain.

anemia; developmental harm, especially in children; and other serious health problems.<sup>27</sup>

## Contaminated Soil

Soil sample data from the OUs closest to the detention camp show arsenic and PAHs in the shallow soils surrounding the detention camp. This type and concentration of soil contamination can produce particulate matter that is harmful

if accidentally consumed, breathed in, or comes into contact with the skin. Children could come into contact with contaminated soil or groundwater via dust, flooding, playing outdoors, or storm surge from tropical storms. Chemicals unearthed in remedial activities like soil removal could also evaporate into the air, creating, in high enough concentrations, vapor intrusion into the camp.

Some OUs have shown an *increase* in contamination. OU 26, for example, was

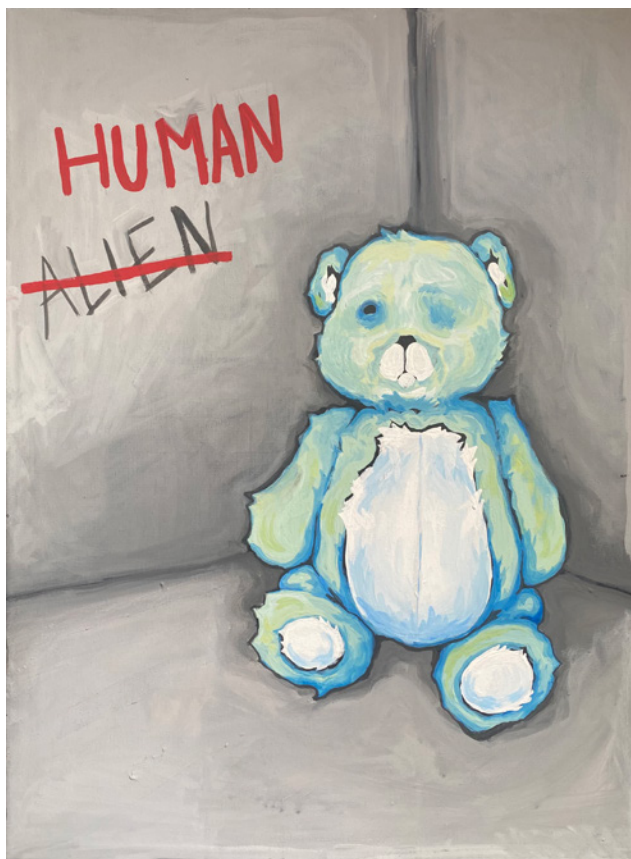
<sup>27</sup> Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Lead – ToxFAQs* (August 2020), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts13.pdf>; ATSDR, *Arsenic – ToxFAQs* (August 2007), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/TSP/substances/ToxSubstance.aspx?toxid=3>; ATSDR, *What Health Effects Are Associated With PAH Exposure?*, [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health\\_effects.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health_effects.html); Chiu, et al., *Human Health Effects of Trichloroethylene: Key Findings and Scientific Issues*, 121(3) *Environmental Health Perspective* 303-311 (2013); ATSDR, *Mercury – ToxFAQs* (April 1999), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts46.pdf>.



used for aircraft maintenance, and is contaminated with PD-680, a solvent that contains ethylbenzene. At OU 26, southeast of the detention camp, an increase of tetrachloroethylene contamination was detected in 2013.<sup>28</sup> The most recent report from the EPA calls for additional remedial action and states that *only* industrial use is appropriate at the OUs.<sup>29</sup>

## Contaminated Groundwater

There is also contamination present in the groundwater surrounding the detention camp. The two closest OUs, 20 and 21, are directly southeast of the camp. OU 21 was once a building used to store flammable chemicals, acids, and other hazardous waste. Arsenic contamination at OU 21 has *increased* over time—suggesting that legacy contamination is not being properly contained. The monitoring wells that registered this increase are only 130 and 140 feet from the detention center.<sup>30</sup>



Romero Ortiz, "Human"

28 Air Force Civil Engineer Center/Environmental Protection Agency 2016: (xvi).

29 Air Force Civil Engineer Center/Environmental Protection Agency 2016: (xiv).

30 Air Force Civil Engineer Center for the Environmental Protection Agency Third FYR at xiv and 31 (explaining increase in arsenic contamination at OU 21) and Figure 5-1 (showing location of monitoring wells at OU 21, with MW-16 and MW-A being approximately 130 and 140 feet from the detention center).

# HARMS

**The contaminants present in soil and groundwater near the Homestead camp are dangerous to the health and development of children:**

## ARSENIC

**Arsenic is a toxic heavy metal and known human carcinogen.**<sup>31</sup> Long-term arsenic exposure has been linked to an increased risk of skin cancer and cancer in the liver, bladder, and lungs, and neurodevelopmental harm.

Low levels of arsenic exposure can cause sore throat, irritated lungs, nausea, vomiting, decreased production of red and white blood cells, abnormal heart rhythm, and damage to blood vessels.<sup>32</sup>

## LEAD

**Lead is a toxic heavy metal that is a neurotoxin and probable human carcinogen.**<sup>33</sup> There is no known safe level of lead in the human body. Even at low levels of exposure, lead can cause damage to the brain, kidneys, and reproductive organs. The developing bodies of children are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning,<sup>34</sup> and exposure to low levels of lead during early life can result in irreversible neurological harm, impaired cognitive function, and neurodevelopmental disorders like ADHD.<sup>35</sup>

## MERCURY

**Mercury is a toxic heavy metal that primarily affects the nervous system;** at high levels of exposure, mercury can damage the brain and kidneys and “irritability, shyness, tremors,

31 The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization designates arsenic as carcinogenic to humans. See <https://monographs.iarc.who.int/list-of-classifications>.

32 Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Arsenic – ToxFAQs* (August 2007), available at <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/TSP/substances/ToxSubstance.aspx?toxid=3>. Accessed April 13, 2021.

33 The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization designates lead as probably carcinogenic to humans. See <https://monographs.iarc.who.int/list-of-classifications>.

34 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Childhood Lead Poisoning* (July 2021), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/tracking/topics/ChildhoodLeadPoisoning.htm>.

35 Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Lead – ToxFAQs* (August 2020), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts13.pdf>; see also Braun, et al., “Exposures to Environmental Toxicants and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in U.S. Children,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 114(12): 1904-1909 (2006).

changes in vision or hearing, and memory problems”<sup>36</sup> may result from damage to the brain. Young children are more sensitive to mercury exposure than adults, and exposure during early life is linked to irreversible neurodevelopmental harm, including irreversible neurodevelopmental harm, “incoordination, blindness, seizures, and inability to speak.”<sup>37</sup>

## POLYCYCLIC AROMATIC HYDROCARBONS

**Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, are a toxic class of chemicals found in fossil fuels and generated during the combustion of coal, gas, wood, tobacco, and other materials.**

Several PAHs are carcinogenic to humans.

Long-term exposure has been linked to skin, lung, bladder, and gastrointestinal cancers and “heritable genetic damage” in humans, meaning that this genetic damage be passed down to future generations.<sup>38</sup>

## TRICHLOROETHYLENE

**Trichloroethylene (TCE) is a volatile and toxic solvent used to remove grease from metal parts, and is a known human**

**carcinogen**<sup>39</sup>. Short-term exposure to TCE can lead to searing chemical burns, headaches, and dizziness. At very high levels of exposure, TCE can lead to coma and even death. Long-term exposure has been linked to an increased risk of liver, kidney, and blood cancers as well as autoimmune disease and reproductive harm. Exposure to TCE during pregnancy can harm the developing fetus and lead to neurodevelopmental harm, low birth weight, and congenital heart defects.<sup>40</sup>

36 Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Mercury-ToxFAC* (April 1999), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts46.pdf>.

37 Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Mercury-ToxFAC* (April 1999), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts46.pdf>.

38 Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *What Health Effects Are Associated with PAH Exposure?*, Available at: [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health\\_effects.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health_effects.html); Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons: Key Concepts*, available at [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health\\_effects.html#key\\_points](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/polycyclic-aromatic-hydrocarbons/health_effects.html#key_points).

39 The International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization designates trichloroethylene as probably carcinogenic to humans. See <https://monographs.iarc.who.int/list-of-classifications>.

40 Chiu, et al., “Human Health Effects of Trichloroethylene: Key Findings and Scientific Issues,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 121(3): 303-311 (2013); Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), *Trichloroethylene-ToxFAC* (June 2019), available at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts19.pdf>.





**An image taken by drone of the detention camp and military base. The four central buildings are dormitories used by the detention camp. The base tarmac and runway are visible beyond the camp. In the upper right corner are the new SOCSOUTH headquarters. Homestead, Florida. April 2021. Image courtesy of Christine Kane.**

## Land Use Restrictions

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says that these sites are not safe for people to live. The EPA Soil Cleanup Target Levels (SCTLs) for these OUs are industrial, **not residential**.<sup>41</sup> Residential screening levels are significantly more protective than industrial screening levels, which means remediation to industrial levels does not provide protection for residential use. In order to prevent these sites from being used for residence, the

EPA and other government agencies establish use restrictions.

Most of the property surrounding the detention camp was transferred from the Air Force to Miami-Dade County in 2005 with an environmental use restrictive covenant that prohibits the use of the property for “permanent residential purposes, hospitals for human care, public or private schools

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Air Force Civil Engineer Center for the Environmental Protection Agency, *Third Fifth Year Review* (2016) at xiv, xvi.

for persons under 18 years of age, or day care centers for children.”<sup>42</sup> These restrictions apply to property that is directly north and south of the detention camp.

In 2014, the U.S. military Special Operations Command South (SOCSOUTH) completed a new headquarters constructed roughly 1,000 feet southwest of the detention camp. These headquarters are subject to strict environmental use restrictions.



José Dehorta, “Hell in Disguise”

**The federal government prohibits the use of the new facility or the land surrounding it for “permanent residential structures, hospitals, public or private schools, or day care centers” in order to “avoid accidental exposure to arsenic contamination in soils and groundwater onsite.”<sup>43</sup> Yet this building is *farther* away from the contaminated OUs than the detention camp.**

42 For example, Clerk of the Court, Miami-Dade County. September 30th, 2004. “Indenture between the United States of America and Miami-Dade County Regarding Parcel D-4,” CFN 2005R0212582, Recorded 03/03/2005, Harvey Ruvin, Clerk of the Court, Miami-Dade County, Florida. Page 5. Parcel D-4 is 211.02 acres, directly north of what is now the detention camp (beginning below 280th St. and 127th Ave).

43 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. June 2011. “Final Environmental Assessment, Construction and Operation of U.S. Special Operations Command South Headquarters Adjacent to Homestead Air Reserve Base”, p. ES-8. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a611154.pdf>.





**An image taken by drone of the detention camp. The tarmac and runway of the Homestead Air Reserve Base are visible beyond the detention camp dormitories. Homestead, Florida. April 2021.** Image courtesy of Christine Kane.

## Other Environmental Harms

A 2018 Environmental Assessment, accessed via FOIA request, documented toxins including asbestos, lead-based paint, and mold in the decaying buildings of the former Job Corps campus, which were repurposed into parts of the detention camp.<sup>44</sup> The same assessment

warned that a 1992 study found elevated levels of radon present in some buildings. The assessment also reports that radon levels in some buildings “have not been mitigated or retested since 1992.”<sup>45</sup> The EPA reports that radon causes lung cancer and children are “considerably

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44 Department of Labor. “Environmental Assessment: Homestead Job Corps Center Proposed Disposal and Reuse, Homestead, Florida,” November 2018. Obtained via FOIA request from the Department of Labor.

45 Department of Labor. “Environmental Assessment: Homestead Job Corps Center Proposed Disposal and Reuse, Homestead, Florida,” Obtained via FOIA request from the Department of Labor. November 2018: 5-21.



more sensitive to the carcinogenic effects” of radon than adults.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the normal operation of the Homestead Air Reserve Base generates “pesticides, herbicides, POL (petroleum, oil, and lubricants), flammable solvents, contaminated fuels and lubricants, paint/

coating, stripping chemicals, waste oils, waste paint-related materials, and other universal wastes.”<sup>47</sup>

**As of October of 2021, we have not seen any evidence of environmental testing to determine whether the detention camp site is safe for children.**

## Chronic Noise Exposure

The detention camp is not only toxic, it is also loud. The camp is adjacent to the Homestead Air Reserve base, which routinely flies F-16C fighter jets. Children detained at the camp were exposed to chronic noise at levels associated with cognitive injury and developmental harm.

According to the U.S. Air Force, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the U.S. Department of Housing

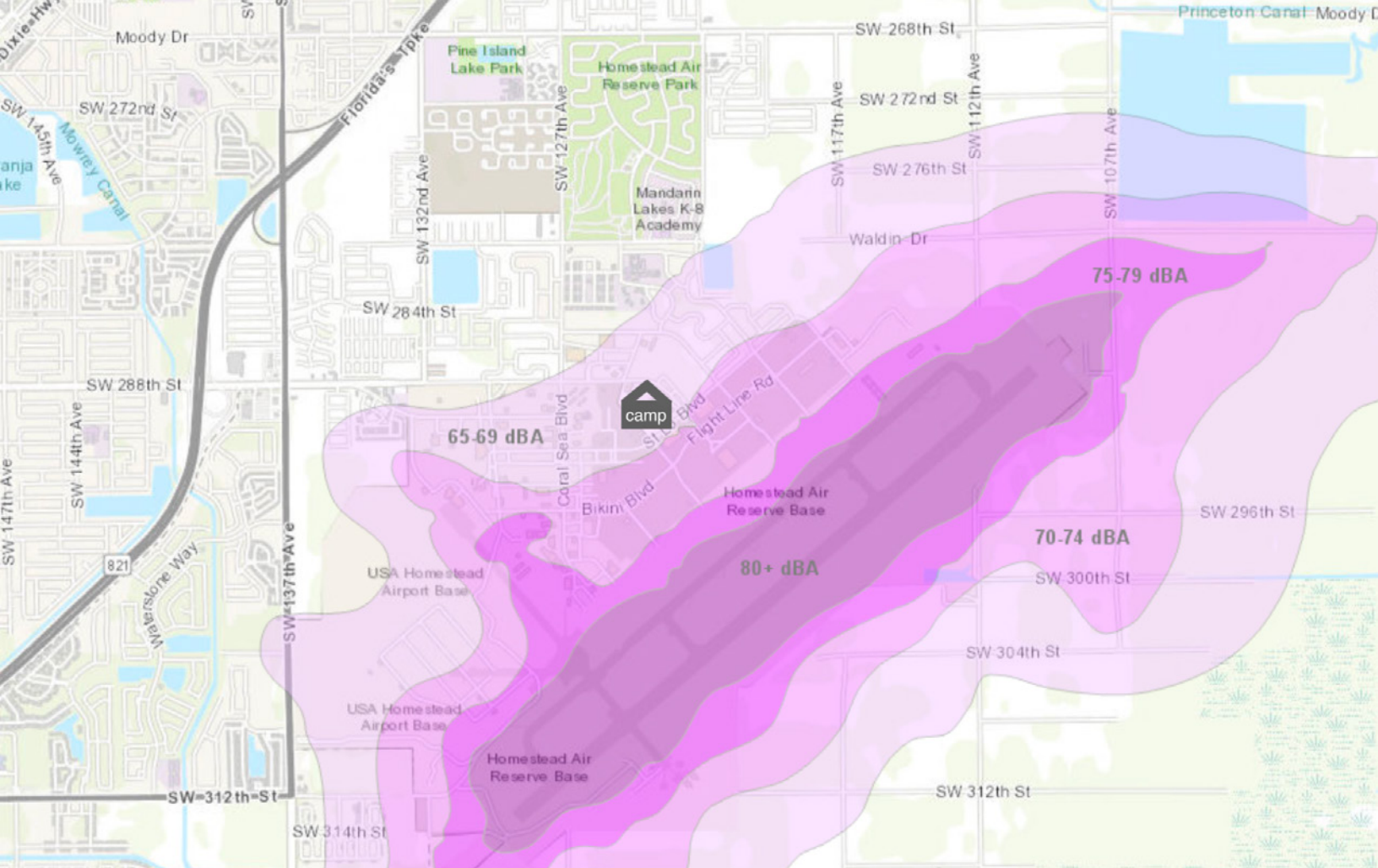
and Urban Development (HUD), human residence is “normally unacceptable” in areas exposed to between 65 and 75 decibels.<sup>48</sup> A 2017 Miami-Dade County memorandum placed the site of the detention camp partially in a 65-decibel zone, relying on a fourteen-year-old, outdated study.<sup>49</sup> An updated, 2017 study places the detention camp almost completely in the 65 to 69 decibel zone, due to expanded aircraft use at the

46 United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Health Risks of Radon*, available at <https://www.epa.gov/radon/health-risk-radon#iowa>. See also Branco et al, “Children’s Exposure to Radon in Nursery and Primary Schools,” *International Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, April 2016: 13(4): 386. Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4847048/>.

47 Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command. February 2007. “Environmental Assessment for 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Actions at Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida,” 3-57.

48 Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, *Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) Study for the Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida* (October 2007) at 3-1, available at <https://www.homestead.afrc.af.mil/Portals/134/Documents/Homestead%20ARB%202020%20AICUZ%20Public%20Brochure%20Booklet.pdf>.

49 Miami-Dade County 2017, 20. For the 2007 AICUZ study, see: Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, *Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) Study for the Homestead Air Reserve Base, Florida* (October 2007) at 3-1, available at <https://www.homestead.afrc.af.mil/Portals/134/Documents/Homestead%20ARB%202020%20AICUZ%20Public%20Brochure%20Booklet.pdf>.



**Sound exposures at Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Minors. The pink shading indicates decibel level. The camp is mostly within the 65 to 69 decibel range, with a small part of property in the 70-74 decibel range.** Map created by Emma Shaw Crane, using publicly available ESRI ArcGIS data.<sup>50</sup>

Homestead Air Reserve Base.<sup>51</sup>

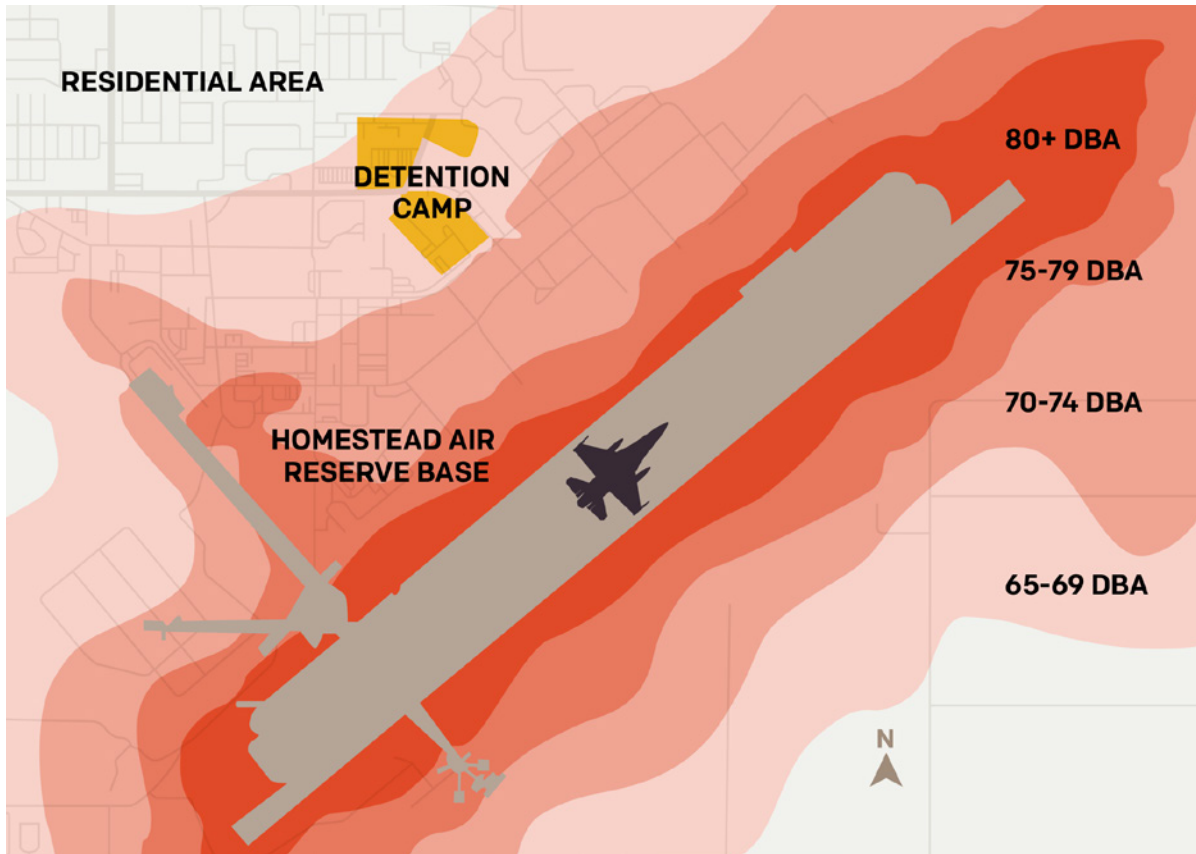
The World Health Organization argues that chronic environmental noise exposure is linked to impaired cognition and neurodevelopment in children,

particularly related to tasks involving central processing and language, such as reading comprehension, memory, and attention.<sup>52</sup> Exposure to chronic noise during childhood can potentially “impair development and have a lifelong effect

50 ESRI ArcGIS. 2017. “Noise Study Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) Informational (Public Access): 2014 to 2017 Noise Study Comparison, Homestead Air Reserve Base.” Available at: <https://arcg.is/1005yv>.

51 ESRI ArcGIS. 2017. “Noise Study Air Installation Compatible Use Zone (AICUZ) Informational (Public Access): 2014 to 2017 Noise Study Comparison, Homestead Air Reserve Base.” Available at: <https://arcg.is/1005yv>.

52 World Health Organization, *Burden of disease from environmental noise* (2011) at 45-48, available at [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf).



**Noise exposure at the Homestead detention camp.** Designer: Heather Sourwine 2021.

on educational attainment.”<sup>53</sup> Studies suggest that an estimated 30% of children routinely exposed to noise at 65 dB experience cognitive impairment.<sup>54</sup>

Miami-Dade County prohibits “schools,

hospitals, barracks, apartment buildings and religious facilities or other buildings of public assembly” in zones of 65 to 75 decibels.<sup>55</sup> Certain residential uses are also prohibited, including “residential uses in excess of 1 dwelling unit per 5

53 World Health Organization, *Burden of disease from environmental noise* (2011) at 45-48, available at [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf).

54 The percentage of children who experience cognitive impairment as a result of chronic noise exposure increases from 10% at 55 decibels to 30% at 65 decibels and 55% at 75 decibels. World Health Organization, *Burden of disease from environmental noise* (2011) at 45-48, available at [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf).

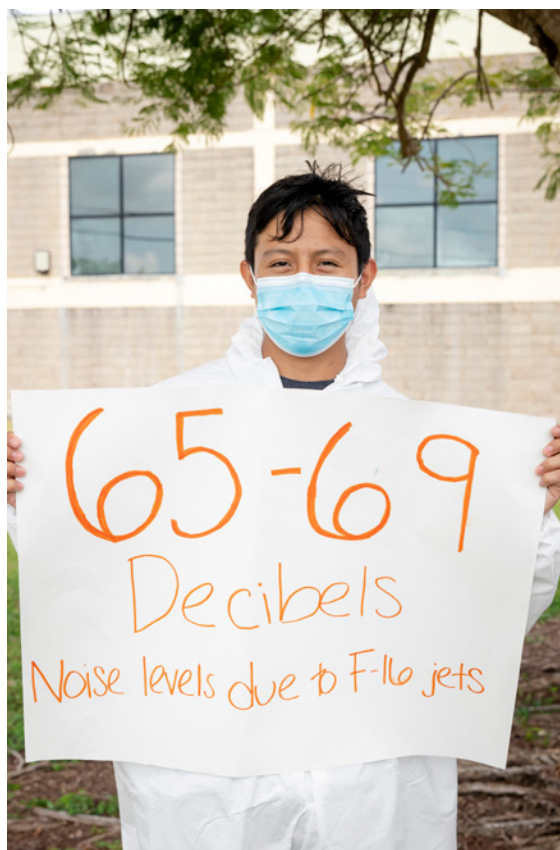
55 Miami-Dade County. January 24th, 2017. “Memorandum: Ordinance pertaining to zoning and real property transactions in the vicinity of Homestead Air Reserve Base (HARB),” Section 33-295, 18.



acres.”<sup>56</sup> All new buildings within such zones are required to incorporate “at least a 25-decibel outdoor-to-indoor Noise Level Reduction into the design and construction of the structure.”<sup>57</sup> There are no records that anyone carried out a Noise Risk Assessment at the detention camp or took any such measures to protect the children detained at the camp.

## Research Conclusions

According to parameters established by the EPA, the U.S. Air Force, and Miami-Dade County, the property surrounding the Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Alien Children is unsuitable for residential use, schools, childcare, or hospitals. The detention camp is directly adjacent to active and unremediated Superfund Operable Units (OUs) that remain contaminated at levels exceeding what is allowed for residential use. Given the lack of data available about conditions at the detention camp itself and the decades-long presence of harmful contaminants, we are concerned that hazardous materials at unsafe concentrations are present in the detention camp area.



**Leonardo, a formerly detained youth, protesting chronic noise exposure and the potential reopening of the Homestead detention camp. In early 2021, the AFSC organized to prevent the Biden administration from reopening the camp and demanded environmental testing at the detention camp site.** Credit: Armando Carrada

Noise levels at the detention camp are estimated to be in the 65-69 dBA (decibel) range, which is “normally unacceptable” for human residence. An estimated thirty percent of children

56 Miami-Dade County. January 24th, 2017. “Memorandum: Ordinance pertaining to zoning and real property transactions in the vicinity of Homestead Air Reserve Base (HARB),” Section 33-295, Use Restrictions, (e), 18.

57 Miami-Dade County. January 24th, 2017. “Memorandum: Ordinance pertaining to zoning and real property transactions in the vicinity of Homestead Air Reserve Base (HARB),” Section 33-295, (e), 18.



**A local farmworker from partner organization the Farmworker Association of Florida joins an action against the Homestead detention camp.** Photographer: Adam Barkan.

exposed to 65-69 decibel noise experience cognitive impairment.<sup>58</sup> We do not know if the buildings used to house detained children were adequately soundproofed, as required by Miami-Dade County. Moreover, child detainees were spending large parts of their days in tents, where noise exposure is potentially greater.

The burden of proof with respect to health and safety of children at the detention camp belongs to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the government agency responsible for the care of detained

children. Following the letter we sent to HHS and other federal officials in March 2021 outlining the known environmental hazards at Homestead, HHS officials cannot claim to be unaware of the health and safety risks. Yet the Biden Administration has not publicly rescinded its plans to reopen Homestead and meanwhile, we can find no evidence that environmental testing has taken place at the site.

<sup>58</sup> World Health Organization, *Burden of disease from environmental noise* (2011) at 45-48, available at [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/136466/e94888.pdf).





Interfaith protest demanding the closure of the Homestead detention camp, 2018.  
Photographer: Adam Barkan.

# ORGANIZING AGAINST INJUSTICE

In recent years, AFSC and Earthjustice have been organizing against the harmful forces of militarism and environmental racism in Homestead and in the U.S. immigration system nationally.

In addition to the known environmental

hazards surrounding the Homestead detention camp, the city of Homestead is also a heavily policed community. Local police will set up roadblocks at busy intersections and check drivers' licenses, which undocumented people cannot obtain in Florida. Between 2016 and





**Guadalupe de la Cruz leads protestors at an interfaith vigil and protesting demanding the closure of the Homestead detention camp, 2018.** Photographer: Adam Barkan.

2018, the number of charges related to drivers' licenses nearly tripled.<sup>59</sup> The vast majority of traffic-related charges are related to driving without a license. These police roadblocks, along with immigration raids, are often used to detain and deport undocumented migrants. In 2019, Florida Governor Ron De Santis signed SB 168 into law, an "anti-sanctuary city" bill that

required local law enforcement to do the work of federal immigration agents.

Migrant detention is just one example of how militarism impacts our communities. In order to build safe and healthy communities, we need to organize against all forms of state violence.

<sup>59</sup> Community Justice Project. 2019. "Driving Without a License," Report produced for WeCount! Homestead, Florida.

The harmful environmental conditions at the detention camp are a problem of **environmental racism**. But this is not the only example of environmental racism faced by community members in Homestead. The town is an agricultural community, home to vegetable and fruit crops and to nurseries for ornamental plants and palms. Farmworkers are regularly exposed to environmental hazards, such as extreme heat (being made worse by climate change) and toxic pesticides, that lead to long-term health harms. For years, AFSC has helped migrant farmworkers and low-income community members organize to better protect themselves in the workplace.

We see other examples of environmental racism in detention and incarceration of people across the U.S. The detention camp for migrant children at Fort Bliss, Texas, the largest military base in the United States, is adjacent to a military Superfund site.<sup>60</sup> Other detention camps on or near Superfund sites include camps at the Lackland Air Force Base and Goodfellow Air Force Base in Texas;

## **WE SEE OTHER EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN DETENTION AND INCARCERATION OF PEOPLE ACROSS THE U.S.**

the Northwest Detention Center outside of Tacoma, Washington; and the Federal Correctional Complex in Victorville, California, a federal prison that doubles as an ICE detention facility on what used to be the George Air Force Base. The detention camp in Tornillo, Texas, and the Karnes County Residential Center in South Texas are both proximate to environmental hazards, including contaminated soil, air, and groundwater.<sup>61</sup>

Following the Trump administration's "zero-tolerance" immigration policy in 2018, Earthjustice submitted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the U.S. Army and the Air Force to obtain information about the military bases where the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health

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60 Global Environmental Justice Project. 2019. "Toxic Detention: The Trend of Contamination in the American Immigration System," UC Santa Barbara. Report available at: [https://gejp.es.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/envs.d7\\_gejp2/files/sitefiles/publication/GEJP%20Special%20Report%202019.pdf](https://gejp.es.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/envs.d7_gejp2/files/sitefiles/publication/GEJP%20Special%20Report%202019.pdf).

61 Global Environmental Justice Project. 2019. "Toxic Detention: The Trend of Contamination in the American Immigration System," UC Santa Barbara. Report available at: [https://gejp.es.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/envs.d7\\_gejp2/files/sitefiles/publication/GEJP%20Special%20Report%202019.pdf](https://gejp.es.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/envs.d7_gejp2/files/sitefiles/publication/GEJP%20Special%20Report%202019.pdf). See also Earthjustice, *Toxic Cages: Toxic contaminants at Goodfellow Air Force Base put children's health at risk*, February 2019. Available at: [https://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/files/Goodfellow\\_report\\_2019-02-11.pdf](https://earthjustice.org/sites/default/files/files/Goodfellow_report_2019-02-11.pdf).





**Interfaith organizing allies from Temple Beth Shalom deliver letters to youth detained at the Homestead detention camp, 2019.** Photographer: Lis-Marie Alvarado.

and Human Services (HHS) proposed the construction of temporary facilities to detain unaccompanied children and families. The sites identified, Fort Bliss and Goodfellow Air Force Base, shared a common characteristic: these bases have known toxic waste sites like radiological contaminants and hazardous chemicals that put human health at risk. In 2020, Earthjustice also submitted a FOIA request to DHS and HHS for records pertaining to the Tornillo detention center expansion and the safety and environmental analysis of the site. The lack of timely responses to the FOIA requests resulted in Earthjustice filing FOIA lawsuits between 2018 and 2020, demanding that the

government immediately provide the requested information. For Fort Bliss and Goodfellow, the records obtained from litigation revealed that during the clean-up remediation process, some of their sites were deemed adequate for industrial or commercial use, but *not* for residential use, which is alarming information if temporary detention centers were to be constructed nearby or on these sites. The records also revealed that logistically, searching for potential detention centers sites in military bases is a yearly recurring process, and while DHS ultimately decided not to pursue temporary detention on these military bases in 2018 because of the monetary expense, HHS remains willing to continue



to pursue this option, as demonstrated by their decision in 2021<sup>62</sup> to move forward with a temporary detention center at Fort Bliss. For Tornillo, the process of receiving records through litigation is currently ongoing.

Injustices like these have gone on for far too long—and communities across the U.S. are taking a stand to end them. In Homestead, AFSC has supported young people and other community members in organizing against detention, militarism, and environmental racism.

As part of our efforts to shut down the detention camp in Homestead, we brought together communities of faith in South Florida—and connected with advocacy on the national level. We helped establish the #EndChildDetention campaign with local and national partners. Locally, immigrant rights organizations, environmentalists, medical professionals, teachers, LGBTQ+ groups, faith allies and youth were part of the coalition in Homestead. On the national level larger immigrant rights organizations and progressive policy groups assisted in constructing policy

and lobbying efforts. Local coalition members traveled to Washington, D.C. to protest in the capital. AFSC also helped train and prepare our youth leaders in Homestead to advocate for their detained peers.<sup>63</sup>

Through the campaign, organizers were responsible for the behind-the-scenes work of actions and communications, and community members stepped up to mobilize more people. Faith leaders talked with others at their centers of worship, gathering them to join protests and rallies outside the detention center. Youth leaders collected handwritten letters of support for the youth detained and spoke during a youth-led press conference.

These efforts paid off. In October 2019, the detention camp in Homestead was closed. Today we must ensure that the Homestead facility remains closed for good. And that we continue to support young people and other community members organizing against detention, militarism, and environmental racism in their communities.

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62 Earthjustice. 2021. "Groups: Biden Needs to End Child Detention at Fort Bliss Now," Available at: <https://earthjustice.org/news/press/2021/groups-biden-needs-to-end-child-detention-at-fort-bliss-now>.

63 Mariana Salome Martinez. 2020. "Case Study: Campaign to shut down the Homestead Child Detention Center," Thesis submitted for the degree of master's in education, Community and Social Change, School of Education and Human Development, University of Miami.



## LIS-MARIE ALVARADO



Lis-Marie Alvarado presents to elected officials on the End Child Detention Campaign. Photographer: Bryan Vana.

*“ I do not want Homestead to be treated like a garbage dump for Superfund sites, nuclear plants and the Air Reserve Base. I no longer want harsh pesticides to be used in fields that poison our water resources, wildlife, and people. The situation in Homestead is infuriating since it is a place that enriches Miami-Dade County, the state and private companies that profit from agricultural work. Yet the workers and their families in the area are very often seen as disposable and treated as lesser humans.*

*I would like for Homestead to be remembered not as a place that is used to detain immigrant children but as a place where the community shut down the largest for-profit detention center and set children free.*

*I would like for people to know there are organizations like AFSC who organize those directly impacted by environmental racism and structural oppression. Collectively we are building local alternatives that center people’s power, ecological resilience and respect for immigrants. Homestead for me is a beautiful, thriving place, where nature and community can live together, prosper, and inspire others to take action.”*

## GUADALUPE DE LA CRUZ



Guadalupe de la Cruz speaks to protestors at a car caravan in April 2021 protesting the public announcement to reopen the Homestead Detention Center. Photographer: Carrie Feit.

“For years we’ve been organizing just around farmworker and labor rights issues and training people how to really protect yourself in the workplace. We in South Florida are Ground Zero...our organizing intentionally highlights the intersection of climate change and migration, because climate change affects farmworkers, who face hotter days every year.

Climate change also affects the crops—these disasters destroy crops and livelihoods. And the conditions that people live and work in causes long-term health hazards, including from pesticides. And we are seeing that our government designates toxic and contaminated land to house and to hold migrants; it’s not just Homestead, we have seen detention centers in and around toxic places, these detention centers on toxic lands, these jails and prisons on toxic land.

Our work is about making these connections and understanding how environmental injustice affects immigrant, undocumented, and people of color.”





Mariana Martinez speaking outside the US Capitol in Washington DC during a press conference with members of Congress and faith leaders advocating against child detention in 2019.

Photographer: Lis-Marie Alvarado.

## MARIANA MARTINEZ

*“ I am proud and inspired by the leadership in our community and organizations that took on this monster of a fight.*

*We created local change that saved lives and put pressure on national policy.”*

# OUR DEMANDS

## We demand that the Biden administration:

1. Permanently close the Homestead detention camp, guaranteeing that no person will ever be detained or incarcerated there again.
2. Carry out comprehensive soil, groundwater, and air testing at the site of the Homestead detention camp, so that the children detained, their families, and the public can fully understand the hazards and risks faced at the camp. All environmental testing should evaluate exposure and toxicity against a baseline that is protective of children's health.
3. Conduct an assessment of noise exposure to show how children detained at the camp may have been affected. All environmental testing should evaluate exposure and toxicity against a baseline that is protective of children's health.

## END ALL DETENTION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

### *Not here, not anywhere*

Decriminalize and de-stigmatize the presence of migrant children in the U.S. Reunite children with their families or place them in the care of sponsors as quickly as possible; fund and implement community-based alternatives that comply with the rights of children at all stages when in the custody and care of the federal government. Enact any and all immigration policies that uphold the rights, dignity, and humanity of all people. Migrant children should be in nurturing, safe environments designed for their wellbeing.





Youth protester at the gates of the Homestead detention center, 2018. Photographer: Adam Barkan.

# NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Two projects that are key in our work in Homestead are:

## Seeds of Resistance

The AFSC organized impacted communities to resist environmental violence, militarism, and detention. This means working closely with undocumented people and youth. To build power and fight for the community we want.

We organize youth to prepare a new generation of creative, community-engaged leaders for the immigrant rights movement in Homestead and South Florida. Art is a key component of our organizing. Many of the artists featured in this report were key leaders in organizing to successfully shut down the detention camp, twice.





**Yoana of the AFSC leading a protest at the Homestead detention center, 2019.** Photographer: Guadalupe de la Cruz.

## Painting Towards Freedom

Led by organizer Guadalupe de la Cruz, the youth came together and created art about their lives, the challenges they face, their families, and their communities. Our organizing provided a platform for youth to find healing, community, and power in the process of making art. Youth connected their own experiences of environmental racism, militarism, and immigration to the detention camp. Together, we created a vision of our community, and organized to bring that vision into the world.









**Steven Fisher, "Hope"**

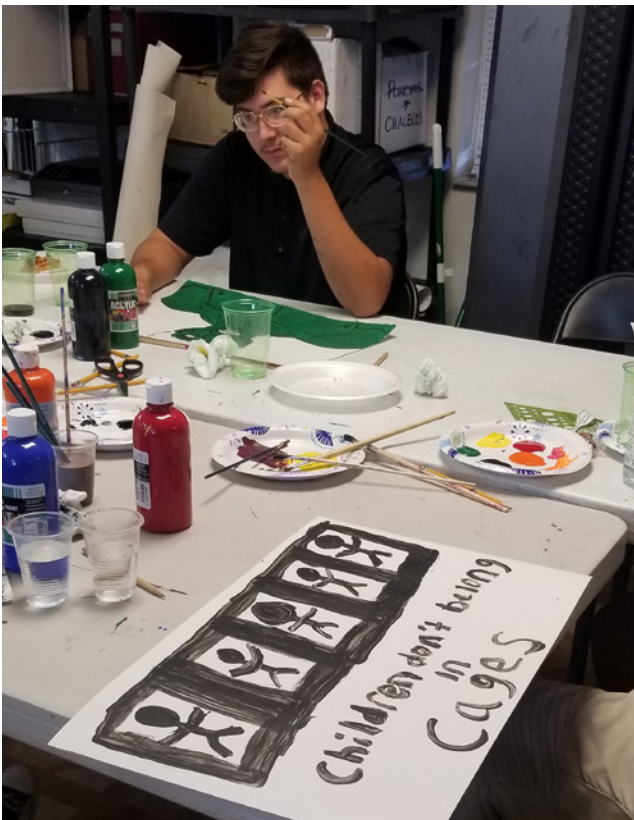
*Page 40, clockwise from top left:*

**Noemi de la Cruz, "The Lost One"**

**Yoana Morales, "Children don't belong in cages"**

**Renee Souvenir, "Forgotten Children"**





*Top:*  
**AFSC youth from South Florida showcasing art done to support the closure of Homestead detention center in Washington, D.C., 2018.** Photographer: Guadalupe de la Cruz.

*Bottom left:*  
**"Children don't belong in cages." AFSC youth prepare for an action demanding the closure of the Homestead detention center and freedom for all children, 2018.** Photographer: Guadalupe de la Cruz.

*Bottom right:*  
**AFSC youth organizers create art as part of the Painting Towards Freedom workshops.** Photographer: Guadalupe de la Cruz.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

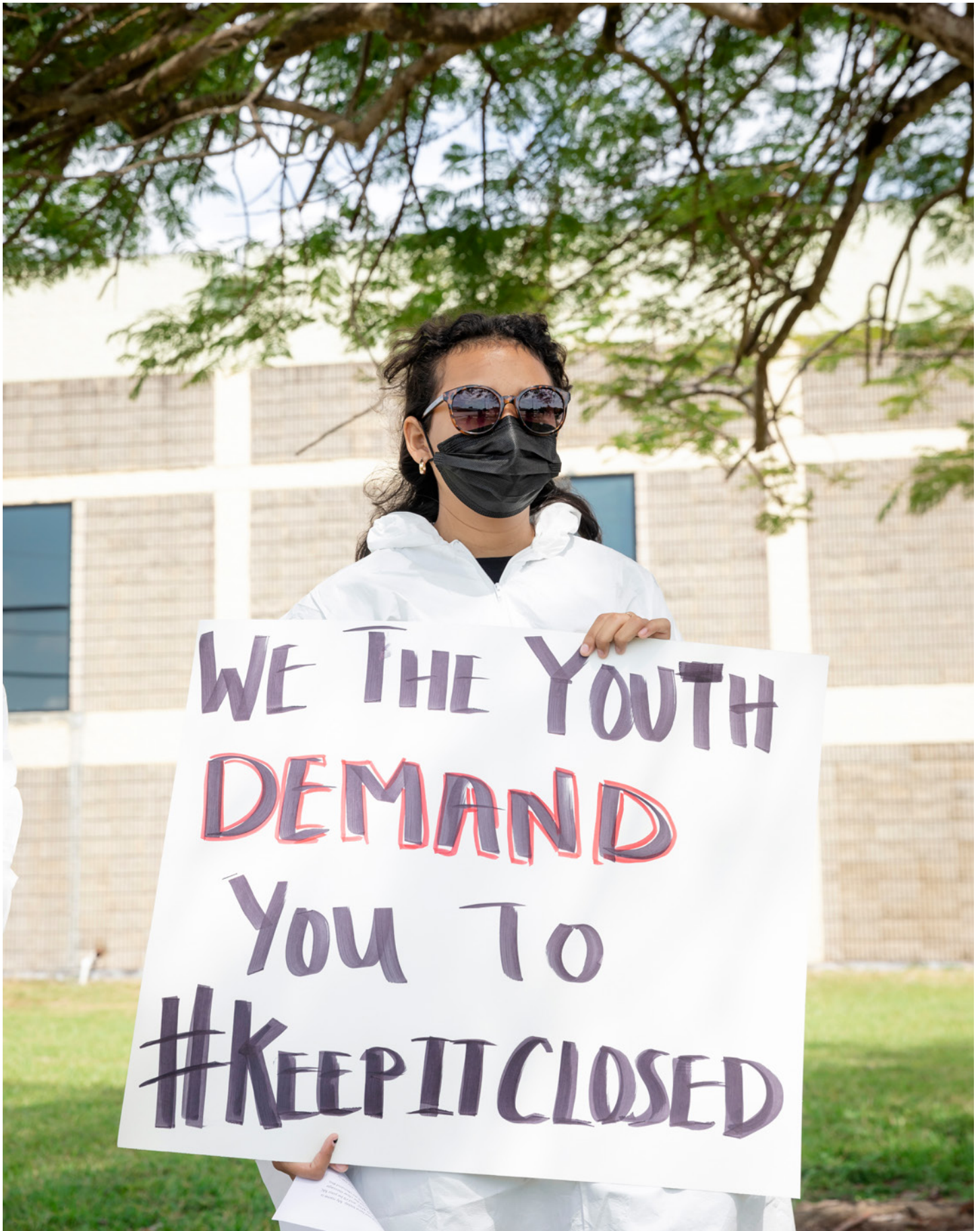
**The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)** is a Quaker organization that promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression. We work with communities and partners worldwide to challenge injustice and build sustainable peace with justice. Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light of each person, we focus on advancing peacebuilding, just economies, healing justice approaches, and humane immigration responses so all people can flourish. The AFSC works for a world where migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people have the power to determine where they live and the opportunity to thrive in society. We work to address both the economic and political drivers of migration in multiple countries as well as to support migrants and refugees, whether they are in transit or settled in new communities. These efforts include legal services, training, human rights monitoring, humanitarian relief, and immigrant-led organizing and advocacy for just immigration policies.

AFSC Florida builds the power of refugees and immigrants in Florida through leadership development, community education, cultural work, art, coalition building, and campaigns for immigrant rights. We also accompany individuals and families through the complex immigration system by assisting clients in the process of becoming legal residents or naturalized citizens.

**Earthjustice** is the nation's premier nonprofit public interest environmental law organization. We wield the power of the law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, and to advance clean energy and combat climate change. Earthjustice believes the law is one of the best tools we have to create lasting change. Earthjustice works in partnership with client organizations and allies to ensure the right to a healthy environment, to hold the powerful accountable, and to enforce and advocate for strong environmental laws.

Earthjustice's Florida Regional Office works for a healthy and safe environment for detained migrants and other vulnerable communities, to protect and restore our unique waterways and ecosystems, and for climate justice and a just transition to clean energy.





AFSC youth organizers in hazmat suits protest environmental violence at the Homestead detention camp and demand that the detention camp remain closed, 2021. Photographer: Armando Carrada.







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