

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 15, 2026

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

CC: Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin, Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier, Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) Executive Director Jared W. Perdue

Governor DeSantis:

As Members of Congress representing the State of Florida, we are sickened by the revelations reported by the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security regarding a wide range of human rights abuses at the Everglades camp operated by FDEM that was cruelly nicknamed “Alligator Alcatraz”.

In particular, the Inspector General’s report found that people were locked in tiny metal enclosures—just 18 square feet—for up to two hours. The federal watchdog found these conditions unprecedented and a significant risk to detainees’ health and safety. People held in this type of cage, nicknamed “the Box,” were isolated and exposed to environmental hazards including extreme heat and insects. This is a clear violation of the prohibition against cruel and unusual punishment in our Constitution, and human rights experts describe this practice as a form of torture.

Many of us conducted oversight inspections at this facility, which was constructed and operated illegally, using over \$1 billion in Florida taxpayer funds designated for responding to emergencies like hurricanes. We witnessed and exposed horrific, inhumane detention conditions that shocked the conscience of our State.

During these visits, Members in our delegation were repeatedly denied access to view these punishment cages, and told by DHS and FDEM employees and contractors that detainee reports of their existence and use for punitive or coercive purposes were categorically false. We were deceived. It is now clear that this was intended to mislead public officials at public expense.

The Inspector General report not only confirms many allegations of sadistic cruelty that we saw or were reported by detainees, but sheds light on why the Trump Administration and Florida’s state government worked overtime to block transparency and accountability.

Shortly after our initial visit, we introduced the No Cages in the Everglades Act to prohibit the use of Federal funds for this appalling project or any other detention facility in the Everglades, require an independent investigation of State and federal laws violated in its construction and management, and permanently codify the rights of Members of Congress to conduct unannounced oversight visits wherever immigrants are detained.

This is not how America should treat human beings in our custody, regardless of their immigration status. We can enforce our laws without abandoning basic human dignity. And in a nation of laws, there must be consequences when elected officials and their appointees rob taxpayer funds to inflict environmental damage, violate Constitutional protections, and commit acts of torture in our backyard. Those responsible for these conditions must be held accountable and we must make sure nothing like this happens again in Florida.

In service to that goal, we request your response to the following questions as soon as possible:

1. How many individuals were subjected to treatment constituting torture under U.S. or international law at the Everglades internment camp or at other immigrant detention facilities in Florida?
2. Has the Office of the Attorney General conducted an analysis of the State's potential civil liability for cruel and unusual punishment without due process at this facility?
3. How many other facilities used for immigrant detention in Florida have utilized isolation in small metal cages as a punitive or coercive measure?
 - a. Who instructed FDEM employees and contractors to deceive Members of Congress conducting lawful oversight with respect to the use of these cages?
 - b. Will you commit to ceasing this practice and dismantling these cages, wherever they are used?
4. Have the State government and its contractors involved in constructing and operating the Everglades detention camp appropriately retained and preserved photographic evidence, digital communications, documents, and other records that may be relevant in future investigations, pursuant to Chapter 119 of the Florida Statutes?
 - a. If so, please provide a list of all relevant evidence that you have retained.
5. Do you commit to fully cooperating with future law enforcement investigations of Florida's involvement in immigration detention abuses?
 - a. If not, are you aware of the potential legal consequences associated with obstructing law enforcement investigations, failing to preserve or report evidence of wrongdoing, or violating court orders or Congressional subpoenas?

We hope that you will take immediate action to bring these abusive practices to an end and begin repairing the damage you have inflicted on our neighbors, our beloved Everglades, and the State of Florida.

Sincerely,



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Lois Frankel
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



Jared Moskowitz
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
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Frederica S. Wilson

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