

2162 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

PHONE: 202-225-6116
FAX: 202-225-5590

WWW.PINGREE.HOUSE.GOV



HELLIE PINGREE
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
1ST DISTRICT, MAINE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND
RELATED AGENCIES

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND
RELATED AGENCIES

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

HOUSE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEES:

BIOTECHNOLOGY, HORTICULTURE, AND
RESEARCH

CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

March 2, 2020

The Honorable Emily W. Murphy
Administrator
General Services Administration
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20405

Dear Ms. Murphy,

I am writing to share the concerns expressed by both my constituents and state elected officials in Maine about the General Service Administration's decision to lease a building in Scarborough, Maine, for an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office that will be adjacent to a Vet Center. I ask that the GSA consider delaying ICE's occupancy of the building until the local community and stakeholders have had the opportunity to engage with GSA and ICE regarding the relocation of the existing ICE facility.

I know that USCIS and ICE are currently co-located, and that their current lease in South Portland, Maine, is ending and both agencies must move. However, of concern here is the lack of transparency and stakeholder participation, as most people learned of the new location via a press report based on an email obtained through the Freedom of Information Act.

There is some concern that ICE presence and activities at the site will negatively impact the immediate area, including the businesses co-located at the site, their patrons, and local residents. Further, there have been additional complaints from veterans who utilize the Vet Center who do not support an ICE facility adjacent to the newly relocated Vet Center. I share their concerns that the presence of the ICE facility could deter non-citizen veterans from seeking medical treatment at the Vet Center, and that the presence of detained individuals at or transiting to the ICE facility could be harmful to veterans diagnosed with trauma-induced mental health disorders. According to press reports, the director of the Vet Center opposes the co-location.

Further, the GSA representative whose email was quoted in the press report, stating that ICE's operations are not expected to "trigger any of the visiting veterans." In that regard, I would appreciate answers to the following questions:

1. Did GSA consult with the director of the Vet Center, VA mental health experts, or the leadership of the Maine VA Medical Center to get their input on the potential effect on veterans prior to approving the lease?

2. Did GSA take into consideration the potential impact on usage of the Vet Center by non-citizen veterans prior to approving the lease? Are there other cases of an ICE facility being co-located with a Vet Center that would provide data?

I think it is important to acknowledge that, despite important public safety objectives, ICE's reputation is under assault. This is the second ICE relocation in my district that has caused a significant public response, in part because the processes were both perceived as secretive. I understand that GSA does not normally take public comment when moving a federal facility, however, the outcry is indicative of serious and growing mistrust of this agency.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. I or my staff would welcome the opportunity to talk with you about these concerns and attend any community conversations.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress

cc: Christopher Averill, Regional Administrator, GSA New England Region
Matthew T. Albence, Deputy Director and Senior Official Performing the Duties of the
Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Attachment:

Letter from Maine State Legislators