



## LAND STEWARDSHIP PROJECT

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August 16, 2018

Dear Mayor Rod Steele,

The Land Stewardship Project's staff and members have learned of a potential private detention center proposed by the Management and Training Corporation (MTC) for the community of Pine Island, and that the Pine Island City Council voted in favor of Resolution 18-16, which supports the development project, even though the public was not informed nor asked for its input on the subject. As an organization, we request that Resolution 18-16 be rescinded and that the City Council host a forum where the public and elected representatives can come together to envision a future that promotes a healthy community without sacrificing values.

The Land Stewardship Project (LSP) is a non-profit, 4,000 household, membership-based organization in Minnesota that works to foster an ethic of stewardship for farmland and develop healthy communities. There are 243 Olmsted County and 133 Goodhue County LSP member households, and as an organization, we believe the proposed corporate-backed detention center goes against our organization's vision and values. Last autumn, hundreds of rural LSP members came together to discuss our shared values and how they should shape the future of our communities. The resulting publication, *A Vision for Rural Minnesota*, articulates our vision for vibrant rural communities that are a place of belonging and opportunity for everyone. We believe that building a migrant detention center, which has been identified and approved by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), does not adhere to this value.

LSP understands that many rural communities are concerned about economic opportunity and the future. Rural communities have not recovered from the most recent economic recession and lag behind urban areas in terms of unemployment and job creation. At the same time, we can't fill the skilled job openings that we do have because of our lack of infrastructure, especially affordable, high quality housing and childcare. Our rural communities need to be revitalized with the kind of economic activity—farms, small businesses, public institutions—that generate long-term wealth while maintaining the integrity of those people who are doing the work of producing goods and services. Utilizing the misery of migrants, and their children, as sources of income, whether through cheap labor or as detainees, is not part of the vision for rural Minnesota the Land Stewardship Project's members hold in high regard. Throughout our nation's history, times of deep economic uncertainty have often fueled bigotry, scapegoating, anti-immigrant sentiment and racist public policy. The truth is corporate-owned prisons are a drain on rural economies, extracting wealth and creating pain and suffering. The proposed detention center is just one example of how corporations extract wealth from rural communities by exploiting people and the land for their own profits. Immigrants are not to blame for our current economic problems, corporations are.

There are several other concerns related to building a detention center in a small community that have been highlighted by Pine Island residents and that need to be acknowledged in all decision-making processes:

- **Negative Regional Economic Impact**—According to the reports *The Development of Last Resort: The Impact of New State Prisons on Small Town Economies (2003)* and *Revisiting the Impact of Prison Building on Job Growth: Education, Incarceration, and County-Level Employment 1976-*

2004 (2002), small towns with new prisons experience less economic growth. Using census data tabulated between 1990 and 2000, towns with new state prisons experienced higher poverty levels, higher unemployment rates, fewer job totals, lower household wages, fewer housing units, and lower median value of housing units in 2000.

- **MTC has a Bad Track Record**—Two references, *A Private Prison Already Failed This Texas County. And Now Officials Want It Back? (2017)* and *Goodbye to Tent City: After a riot destroys a for-profit prison, Willacy County ponders its economic future (2015)*, point to the fact that MTC is poorly managed and a danger to the individuals in detainment. The state of Mississippi filed 11 civil “Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations” lawsuits against MTC and other private prison companies, alleging “a pattern of bribery, kickbacks, misrepresentations, fraud, concealment, money laundering and other wrongful conduct” by these companies. Also, Willacy County Tex., sued MTC for its “abysmal mismanagement of the prison” after a riot over poor conditions closed the facility.
- **Increased Pressure on Resources**—According to *Joining Forces: Prisons and Environmental Justice in Recent California Organizing (2006)*, prisons create new problems in rural areas, including pressure on environmental resources and increasing racial and class inequalities within those communities.
- **Minimal Job Creation**—People in rural communities with prisons are rarely the people employed in prisons, and detention centers often employ detained immigrants, sometimes only paying them \$1 a day, according to *An Analysis Of The Economics Of Prison Siting In Rural Communities (2004)* and *ICE’s Captive Immigrant Labor Force (2017)*.
- **Is This Who We Are?**—In a 2017 report titled, *Concerns about ICE Detainee Treatment and Care at Detention Facilities*, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security reported that detention centers “undermine the protection of detainees’ rights, their humane treatment, and the provision of a safe and healthy environment.”

These are difficult times for rural communities, but our organization believes that real solutions are within reach by investing in projects that support affordable and quality housing, offer affordable childcare options, expand MinnesotaCare so that rural communities have access to quality healthcare coverage, increase mental health services and drug treatment facilities, provide low interest loans and grants for small businesses, improve tax credits so that more beginning farmers can qualify, approve \$100,000 in funding for MDA’s Farm Advocates program to help farmers manage the current market downswings and prevent farm foreclosures, and lastly, provide financial incentives for cover crops and soil health practices that build back soil, a precious resource that rural communities and farmers depend on, while also cleaning and filtering our water.

Again, we ask you, Mayor Steele, to rescind Resolution 18-16 to protect the rural community of Pine Island from corporate exploitation and convene a community meeting where real and healthy solutions to the rural, economic situation are explored by community residents and local officials together. The fact that Resolution 18-16 was passed without public awareness or input is alarming. Democracy works best with many voices at the table.

Please act to keep our local community strong and healthy.

Sincerely,

The Land Stewardship Project Lewiston Staff