



AIA
Austin

November 6, 2018

AIA President Carl Elefante, FAIA
American Institute of Architects
1735 New York Avenue
Washington DC 20006-5292

Dear President Elefante,

AIA Austin is writing to thank you in advance for upholding the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct. In exercising this charge, we are asking that AIA National also develop a public announcement cautioning all architects to reject immigration detention center projects when those centers violate fundamental principles of human rights.

Our country is currently faced with a multitude of issues that challenge us and ask us to reflect on our core values. The climate of discussion has included tactics such as fear, intimidation, physical trauma, and inhumanity. We are proud to be a member of an organization that holds the highest regard for human health, safety, and welfare, and we look to AIA at a national level to clearly remind our members, citizens, and government of the importance of these principles of human rights.

In the context of the current conditions of many immigrant detention centers, we call attention to the following provisions of the AIA Code of Ethics:

E.S. 1.4 Human Rights: Members should uphold human rights in all their professional endeavors. Rule 1.402: Members shall not engage in conduct involving wanton disregard of the rights of others

E.S. 1.5 Design for Human Dignity and the Health, Safety, and Welfare of the Public: Members should employ their professional knowledge and skill to design buildings and spaces that will enhance and facilitate human dignity and the health, safety, and welfare of the individual and the public

As individual citizens and architects it can be overwhelming to view policies that operate so strongly outside of our value set. We look to the strength of our national organization to exercise its voice and take action to bring about fundamental change. We also look to our Statement of Values to guide our policies and positions.

“We stand for equity and human rights”

In standing for these rights, we recognize that access to good design is a fundamental right, and that inhumane conditions, such as keeping people in confined spaces under harsh, cold temperatures, or separating children from their parents, violates this fundamental position.

The American Institute of Architects

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“We stand for architecture that strengthens our communities”

There are many layers to the term community, and we acknowledge that communities are both a collection of the buildings and spaces that create physical fabric, and the ideologies that the members uphold. The inhumane detention centers and policies that populate them, polarize and degrade those ideologies, and degrade the health of our national community and identity.

“We speak up, and policymakers listen”

As natural facilitators and problem-solvers, architects stand ready to develop new policies that create a better, stronger, and more equitable and sustainable society. AIA National should clearly articulate to its members that these facilities are a breach of the AIA Code of Ethics.

AIA Austin appreciates the outreach from other committees and chapters on this topic, such as the Austin committee of Latinos in Architecture (LiA). In its June 2018 Letter to AIA National regarding Immigrant Detention Centers, LiA notes, “As architects we must always promote design that brings positive outcomes to complex problems. We must also uphold human rights in all of our professional endeavors and design for human dignity.” They have been an important partner in shaping our own internal advocacy and position.

The Boston Society of Architects in its Immigration Letter to AIA national, encourages its leaders to, “take action to deepen these words and put them into action”. The AIA New York Statement on Immigration Detention Facilities states, “Design alone is not capable of solving our immigration crisis; however, poor design can be an element of the problem. AIA New York stands strongly on behalf of the wellbeing of those inside these facilities, and in favor of design solutions that benefit them and their families.” AIA Austin supports the advocacy of our LiA committee and our fellow Chapters in this regard.

We recognize that Architects have long been recognized as the agents of change. Our profession has long been responsible for a built environment that reflects our culture and its aspirations. Those aspirations include an environment that holds the universal respect for human dignity and a commitment to tolerance. Many of the current immigration detention center projects and policies do not hold any of the stated values.

As AIA National contemplates its position on immigrant detention facilities, we hope that it will develop a public announcement cautioning all architects to reject immigration detention center projects that violate fundamental principles of human rights. We hope that at every level of our profession we will advocate for policies that strengthen communities. We hope that in every way, and at every time, the public can trust Architects to protect the public’s health, safety, and welfare.

With sincere regards,

Wendy Dunnam Tita, FAIA
2018 AIA Austin President

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