

Joseph D. Morelle
25th District, New York

Washington Office
570 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-3615

Rochester Office
255 East Avenue
Suite 150
Rochester, NY 14604
(585) 232-4850



Committee on House Administration
Ranking Member

Committee on Appropriations
Vice Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Subcommittee on Defense

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 3, 2026

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Noem,

I write to express my unequivocal opposition to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) plan to establish an immigrant detention facility within the Kenneth B. Keating Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in downtown Rochester, New York, and to demand immediate answers regarding this proposal.

According to public reporting, the General Services Administration (GSA) intends to award U.S. Customs and Border Protection a project to construct holding cells capable of detaining individuals for multiple days within the Keating Federal Building. This directive was issued without any consultation with local stakeholders, federal representatives, or my office.

The Keating Federal Building houses the U.S. District Court for the Western District of New York, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the U.S. Marshals Service, and a childcare center. It was never designed or intended to function as a detention facility. Converting this civic courthouse into a site of immigration detention raises serious concerns regarding safety, security, operational integrity, and public trust.

Judges' chambers and a daycare are located close to the proposed space. Thousands of residents, jurors, litigants, attorneys, and federal employees move through this building each week. Given the heightened tensions surrounding federal immigration enforcement nationwide, introducing detention operations into this setting creates unavoidable, foreseeable security risks.

Moreover, it is deeply troubling that this plan was advanced without transparency, public input, or coordination with local officials. Decisions of this magnitude, particularly those affecting courthouse security and child safety, should undergo rigorous review and open communication.

Accordingly, I request written responses to the following no later than seven days from receipt of this letter:

1. Has DHS formally approved or directed the establishment of detention space within the Keating Federal Building? If so, when was that decision made?

2. What operational need justifies locating a detention facility within an active federal courthouse that does not house immigration court proceedings?
3. What security assessments have been conducted regarding the proximity of detention operations to federal courtrooms, judicial chambers, and the on-site daycare?
4. Were the Chief Judge of the Western District of New York, the U.S. Marshals Service, or local government officials consulted prior to advancing this proposal?
5. What alternative facilities were evaluated, and why were those options deemed insufficient?
6. What is the projected capacity, average length of detention, and total cost of buildout and operations?
7. Will DHS commit to pausing any award, lease modification, or construction activity pending full review and stakeholder consultation?

Congress has a constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight of DHS operations, particularly where agency actions may compromise public safety or the functioning of the federal judiciary. The people of Rochester deserve transparency and accountability before any irreversible steps are taken.

I urge DHS to halt this proposal immediately and engage in a transparent process that prioritizes safety, legality, and community impact.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joseph D. Morelle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J".

Joseph D. Morelle
Member of Congress