



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Statement for the Record  
House Committee on the Judiciary  
Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement  
Hearing on “Holiday on ICE: the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s New Immigration  
Detention Standards.”  
*March 28, 2012*

Thank you, Ranking Member Conyers.

I want to begin by gently noting that the people of Puerto Rico that I represent have been American citizens since 1917. While millions of Island residents have relocated to the 50 states over the years, they are not immigrants.

On the one hand, this fact has perhaps made it easier for me to approach the complex issue of immigration with a sense of pragmatism, because it is not as intensely personal for me and my constituents as it is for other members of the Hispanic community, who are on the front lines in the immigration battle.

On the other hand, Puerto Rico, like so many communities around the country, is affected by our nation’s immigration policy in profound ways. For example, there are many immigrants from the Dominican Republic living in Puerto Rico, both authorized and unauthorized. They, too, are my constituents and their welfare is my concern. How we treat these men and women—our fellow human beings—speaks volumes about who we are as a nation and about the values we hold.

With that as backdrop, I must say that I find the premise of today’s hearing to be misguided and, frankly, appalling.

Our immigration detention system has serious problems. The evidence is as well-documented as it is heartrending. Over 110 people have died in immigration custody since 2003. Too many others have been subject to rape, abuse, or medical neglect.

Although there is still a long way to go, DHS and ICE deserve credit for making important strides in reforming our detention system, as reflected in the 2011 national detention standards.

Rather than welcoming these commonsense standards and seeking their implementation at ICE facilities across the nation, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle—and some of today’s witnesses—have claimed that detainees are now being pampered.

That assertion does not even pass the laugh test—but nobody should find it amusing.

Mr. Chairman: the Members of this Subcommittee are blessed to be Americans, citizens of this great democracy, which has done so much to make the world a better, freer, more humane place. But this love of country should be tempered by a sense of humility, rooted in the knowledge that we could just as easily have been born in a darker corner of this world, where liberty or economic opportunity is in short supply.

We should have more empathy for men and women who have left behind everyone and everything they know in order to reach our shores, especially since many detainees violated no criminal law and those that did have already served their sentences. Instead of simply paying lip service to the idea of humane treatment, we ought to promote policies that treat these people with decency and compassion, guided by the understanding that “There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

I look forward to questioning the witnesses and yield back the balance of my time.