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June 29, 2018

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

Dear President Elefante:

The Boston Society of Architects/AIA is writing to encourage a statement from the AIA, cautioning all member architects to reject projects relating to immigrant detention that violate fundamental principles of human rights. Such detention facilities fail to enhance and facilitate human dignity and the health, safety, and welfare of those confined in them. Articulating our position is neither political nor economic, but rather an acknowledgment of our responsibilities to society, as set forth in the AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct.

Specifically, we believe that many immigration detention facility projects violate the following provisions of the AIA Code of Ethics.

- Canon I, Ethical Standard E.S. 1.4, states: “**Human Rights:** Members should uphold human rights in all their professional endeavors.”
- Canon I, Ethical Standard E.S. 1.5, states: “**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.”

The AIA’s September 2017 statement “*Where we stand: immigration and visa restrictions,*” clearly articulates the AIA’s principles of fairness, dignity, and respect for all –specifically immigrants. The AIA affirmed that “people from around the world who desire to live, study, work and travel to and from the United States are vital to American growth and innovation, and that immigration and travel restrictions negatively impact business and the profession of architecture.” The statement is laudable; now we urge our leadership to take action to deepen these words and put them into action. The violation of the human rights that should be afforded to detained immigrants in the U.S. now affects the integrity and dignity of architects, the profession, and our entire society.

Although the current Federal administration has apparently reversed its practice of separating detained children from their families, the administration continues to enforce a “zero tolerance” policy that causes mass warehouse detention of immigrants under inhumane conditions. The United Nations, which governs the treatment and legal process for asylum seekers, recently cited the U.S. for “serious violation of the rights of the child.” The government’s practices regarding its treatment of immigrants continue to degrade and deny the health, safety, and welfare of these vulnerable individuals.

We recognize the dilemma facing architects when asked to design facilities that may be used for or occupied by ethically dubious activities. Such dilemmas are not limited to immigration facilities – in fact, the precise

definition of what constitutes “ethical” design practice is necessarily debatable. We readily acknowledge that there may be needs for different types of government immigration facilities. Many Ports of Entry, for instance, have been recognized with AIA design awards because they were designed to dignify the act of moving between nations. These projects, however, are clearly different from creating tent cities or mass detention centers.

Any facility that is designed to separate children from their families; to house people in cages; to detain people for extreme lengths of time without access to adequate social services or legal representation; or that is located in a site that fails to provide basic amenities or exposes people to extreme heat or cold, violates fundamental principles of human rights and constitutes a clear violation of our ethical responsibilities. Under these circumstances, the architect must err on the side of discretion by only designing work that will “enhance and facilitate human dignity and the health, safety, and welfare of the individual and the public.”

Architects should be extra vigilant when applying for or engaging in this work. The federal government’s current immigration policies warrant this extreme caution. All architects should reject any government, institutional, or private project that fails to recognize immigrants as human beings and that denies them their fundamental human rights. Architects should not design immigration detention facilities whose design fails to protect “the health, safety, and welfare of the individual and the public,” or that directly facilitate practices that “violate basic standards of human decency” or are “unnecessarily cruel.” If an AIA member architect accepts this type of work and later discovers that the scope violates the Code, they should be prepared to resign from the commission, regardless of the cost.

Finally, we want to renew the call that the BSA first made in 2014, for a new Rule of Conduct to enforce the aspirations of Ethical Standards E.S. 1.4 and 1.5. It should be made clear that member architects shall not engage in design work directly resulting in a penal or detention facility that violates fundamental human rights and fails to protect the health, safety and welfare of those who are confined. The AIA should amend its Code and adopt the following enforceable Rule 1.402:

“Members shall not design spaces intended for execution or for torture or other cruel, inhumane, or degrading detention, treatment, or punishment, including prolonged solitary confinement and inhumane treatment of children.”

Architects who violated this Rule could be brought before the National Ethics Council for a serious breach of the Code.

As individual architects and as a professional organization, we should advocate for holistic, humane design. Our prime directive must always be to use design to make the world a better place for everyone.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Wickersham". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

Jay Wickersham FAIA
2018 BSA President