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Migrant Groups: Keep Dehumanizing Ankle ‘Chains’ Out of Biden’s New At-Home Detention Program

According to a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) notice [viewed by Reuters](#), and as reported on February 8 [by Axios](#), the Biden administration is launching a new 120-day pilot program that will place people who migrate under house arrest. This is reportedly part of a larger effort to expand alternative-to-detention programs for people awaiting immigration court dates in the United States.

The Biden administration is moving to expand alternatives-to-detention in the face of widespread evidence that there is no need to detain migrants in order to ensure their appearance in immigration court. Multiple studies (such as [a 2020 report by the Vera Institute of Justice](#), data from the [Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse \(TRAC\)](#), and [a 2021 report](#) by the American Immigration Council) show that when people are guaranteed access to legal counsel or community support services, the overwhelming majority of them comply with their immigration court dates.

There aren’t yet public details confirmed about how the Biden administration’s new pilot program will use ankle bracelets, phone monitoring, or other electronic surveillance methods on program enrollees. [Axios reported](#) that the program “will involve stricter monitoring than other alternative-to-detention (ATD) programs right now,” but the exact measures would vary on a case-by-case basis. A 2021 study by [the Cardozo School of Law](#) detailed how “similar to physical detention, electronic shackling and surveillance is deeply harmful and dangerous.”

In reaction, Alianza Americas released the following statement:

“People who migrate have the right to seek protection and await their immigration court dates, without being locked up,” said Oscar Chacón, executive director of Alianza Americas. **“We’re slated to spend some \$1.8 billion next year on detention beds, despite years of irrefutable evidence that detention is not necessary to ensure that immigrants attend their court dates. Migrant organizations across the U.S. are calling to abolish immigration detention completely because we need policies that allow our communities to live and work freely, in respect of each individual’s humanity and dignity.”**

“Expanding alternatives-to-detention shouldn’t entail broadening the use of sickening and dehumanizing surveillance technology like ankle bracelets,” said Nancy Treviño, Alianza Americas’ associate director for network power. **“Putting people who migrate in electronic ankle chains is deeply rooted in the racist practices that have long driven immigration policies. DHS should confirm as soon as possible that these practices, and**

other forms of abuse-prone electronic surveillance, won't form a part of this new pilot program," Treviño added. "Migrants navigating immigration court need access to legal representation and compassionate support, not an extension of the containment and detention apparatus."

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Alianza Americas is the premier transnational advocacy network of Latin American migrant-led organizations working in the United States, across the Americas, and globally to create an inclusive, equitable and sustainable way of life for communities across North, Central, and South America.

Presente.org is the nation's largest online Latinx organizing group — and the nation's premier Latinx digital organizing hub — advancing social justice with technology, media, and culture. Presente.org is now a project of Alianza Americas.