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## **FEDERAL LAWSUIT DEMANDS GOVERNMENT'S DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION SURROUNDING THE RESUMPTION OF DEPORTATIONS TO HAITI**

WASHINGTON, D.C. (January 11, 2012) – Americans for Immigrant Justice (“AI Justice”) filed a federal lawsuit yesterday seeking to compel the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (“ICE”) to disclose documents relating to the government’s decision in late 2010 to resume the deportation of Haitian immigrants. The government made the decision despite the country’s continued instability and unsafe conditions — including a deadly cholera outbreak — stemming from the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that devastated much of the nation earlier that year. The lawsuit comes after ICE’s refusal to provide the requested information.

In response to the government’s unannounced and unexplained policy to resume deportations to Haiti, AI Justice (formerly Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center) filed a Freedom of Information Act request seeking information surrounding the decision. ICE ultimately denied the request, and in the process further refused to grant AI Justice — an immigrants’ rights non-profit organization — a fee waiver. The complaint alleges that the denials were arbitrary and capricious, in derogation of the agency’s own regulations, and in violation of the Freedom of Information Act.

The Freedom of Information Act, meant to be a check on government secrecy, provides that all federal agency records are accessible to the public unless specifically exempt. It also provides for fee waivers where disclosure of information is in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government. ICE conceded that the information sought by AI Justice concerned the operations and activities of the government, but inexplicably denied the waiver.

“The law clearly entitles us to this important information and this lawsuit seeks to enforce our right to obtain and disseminate it,” said Cheryl Little, the Executive Director of AI Justice, a national organization that defends the rights of immigrants, including the large Haitian population in South Florida dramatically affected by the government’s resumption of deportations. “The U.S. government potentially sends deportees to their deaths amid civil and political turmoil and a dangerous cholera epidemic. The reasons for adopting this unconscionable policy should and must be brought to light,” Little added.

AI Justice has major concerns that the Haitian government routinely detains individuals deported from abroad who are then jailed in filthy facilities that pose life-threatening health risks. One example cited in AI Justice’s complaint is that of Wildrick Guerrier, a 34-year-old longtime resident of the United States who was taken from his American family early in 2010 and placed in detention following his arrival to Haiti. He died shortly after suffering cholera-like symptoms. According to one report by the nonprofit Florida Center for Investigative Reporting, the health risks for incarcerated Haitian deportees have increased significantly since October 2010, which marked the beginning of a cholera outbreak that has infected more than 470,000 people and killed 6,500, including some prisoners.

The federal lawsuit was filed in the United States District Court for the District of Columbia. The national law firm of Jenner & Block LLP serves as counsel on behalf of the Plaintiff, AI Justice.

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*Americans for Immigrant Justice* (AI Justice) has been fighting for the American dream since its founding in 1996. One of the nation’s largest non-profit immigration law firms, AI Justice represents vulnerable immigrants at no charge. This direct service work informs its broader policy work. AI Justice influences national policy; successfully litigates or otherwise challenges patterns of abuse; and educates the public about the impact immigration laws and directives have on our communities. AI Justice is dedicated to protecting and promoting the basic human rights of immigrants. [www.aijustice.org](http://www.aijustice.org).