

# Medical neglect caused deaths of detained immigrants in the US

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2 March 2016

A report released by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Detention Watch Network (DWN) and the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) documents that egregious violations by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) caused the deaths of at least eight detained immigrants between 2010 and 2012.

Violations of ICE medical standards included failure to intervene in a timely manner, staff medical personnel adequately, refer and transfer to higher-level medical care, communicate critical information between staff, screen patients adequately, and identify and rectify concerns about medical care.

The ACLU report, “Fatal Neglect: How ICE Ignores Deaths in Detention,” laments that its initial request under the Freedom of Information Act pertained to 24 deaths. To this day, ICE has not provided investigations for seven of them and in some cases it refuses to review deaths of immigrants held in short-term custody.

In addition, additional reports published on ICE’s web site show that at least 155 similar deaths occurred between October 2003 and January 2016. Figures are based on ICE’s own released data and are at the very least conservative.

In order to conceal the gross level of basic rights violations, in 2009 the Obama administration adopted a “detention reform” that instituted such death reviews. However, violations continued, compounded by millions of deportations. Under Obama’s “reforms,” at least 56 deaths in ICE custody have been reported.

The ACLU report notes that, despite the agency’s admission that it violated medical standards, “ICE detention facility inspections conducted before and after these deaths failed to acknowledge—or sometimes dismissed—the critical flaws identified in the death reviews.” This is essentially an acknowledgement that

Obama’s “detention reform” failed to stop the violations.

The report details the death of eight immigrants:

- Evalin-Ali Mandza, heart attack after egregious delay in calling emergency.
- Amra Miletic, complications of chronic bowel inflammation and heart arrhythmia after almost two months of substandard care.
- Pablo Gracida-Conte, cardiomyopathy after four months of persistent requests for treatment were ignored.
- Anibal Ramirez-Ramirez, liver failure following poor communication, inadequate screenings and delays in referring to higher-level care.
- Irene Bamenga, given an incorrect dosage of medication.
- Fernando Dominguez-Valdivia, pneumonia following failure to provide proper physical examination.
- Victor Ramirez-Reyes, heart disease following failure to monitor and control patient’s blood pressure.
- Mauro Rivera Romero, disseminated cryptococcosis following inadequate screenings, failure to transfer critical information and refer patient to a higher-level provider.

All these deaths could have been avoided, and no one has been or will be held responsible for these crimes. The largest share of political responsibility, however, rests with the Obama administration, whose immigration policies have provoked popular revulsion around the world.

The pictures of women and children being deported en masse, returned to dangerous areas and life-threatening conditions or families being broken apart have given the world a realistic sense of the cruelty and contempt, by the Obama administration, for some of

the most basic democratic rights.

In October 2015, a similar report entitled “Lives in Peril” published by the DWN and the NIJC exposed a system of outright abuse and neglect of the most basic medical needs. That report noted that September 11, 2001 was a turning point for attacks on immigrant rights, and detentions grew exponentially. In fact, the fraudulent “war on terror” was utilized by the US government to launch a massive attack on fundamental democratic rights, including those of immigrants.

That report, like the more recent one, also pointed to ICE’s “culture of secrecy,” through which the federal agency systematically denies availability of documents and operates in complete absence of independent oversight, since the entities responsible for inspections are either housed within ICE or are employed by private companies contracted by ICE.

The US immigration detention system is based on a set of contracts between federal agencies and private corporations. Contract Detention Facilities are privately operated through contracts with ICE. Similarly, Service Processing Centers are operated by ICE, which in turn subcontracts important functions to private companies. The profit motive dominates every aspect of immigration detention.

Such a record points to a sustained criminal practice resulting from decades of anti-immigrant and, more broadly, anti-democratic policies, especially under the Bush and Obama administrations, aimed at the social rights of the working class as a whole. By creating an atmosphere of fear and threats, the government seeks to prevent immigrants from solidarizing with other layers of the working population and resisting poverty and hyper-exploitation.

Since 2009, Obama’s government has deported more than 2.5 million people, an increase of 23 percent over the Bush administration and a historic record. According to the Department of Homeland Security’s web site (see Table 39), at the current pace, Obama will have deported more people than the total of all 19 US presidents from 1892 to 2000, from Grover Cleveland to Bill Clinton.

This does not include at least 2.5 million immigrants who have been “returned” not on the basis of a removal order, but because of restrictive immigration rules. In the last decade alone, the US immigration detention system has grown by 75 percent, with nearly half a

million immigrants jailed every year.

The entire political establishment in the US is deeply and increasingly hostile to immigrant rights, just as they are to democratic rights as a whole. The current election campaign clearly reflects this position, summed up in Donald Trump’s openly xenophobic calls for mass deportations and fascistic attacks against Mexicans and Muslims.

The self-proclaimed “socialist” Bernie Sanders, in addition to making deliberate efforts to outdo his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton with regard to his support for Obama’s police-state measures and imperialist policy, which has been a major cause of millions being forced to flee their countries, has openly declared that opening borders is “a Koch brothers proposal.” His campaign, which vows to “ensure our borders remain secure and protects local communities,” is founded on the very same nationalist foundations used to persecute and deport immigrants.



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