

Guatemalan boy detained by US Border Patrol dies after succumbing to illness

Kevin Martinez
3 May 2019

A 16-year-old boy from Guatemala, whose name has not yet been released, died Tuesday in a Texas children's hospital after being detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP). His death follows two other child immigrants from Guatemala who have also died in the last five months.

The exact cause of death has not been revealed but the boy had been in intensive care for several days in the McAllen, Texas, area for a "brain infection." Although the exact date of his capture by CBP near El Paso, Texas, is unknown he was transferred on April 20 to a facility more than 800 miles away in Brownsville, Texas, run by Southwest Key, a non-profit company that jails up to 1,200 immigrant children in a former Walmart shopping center.

While reportedly in good health upon his arrival, he was taken the next morning to the emergency room after complaining about a fever, chills and a headache. Despite this he was discharged and taken back to the jail the next day.

According to Evelyn Stauffer, a Health and Human Services spokesperson, "The minor's health did not improve after being transferred back to the shelter so on the morning of April 22, 2019, the minor was taken to another hospital emergency department via ambulance."

From there he was taken to an intensive care unit where he died a week later on April 30.

The boy's brother and officials from Guatemala visited him while he was in hospital and family members in Guatemala were also informed of the boy's condition. Officials from the Guatemalan consulate in McAllen said they tried to get humanitarian visas for the parents but were denied because of their age.

The boy is the third child to die in government custody since December when 7-year-old Jakelin Caal

died at a children's hospital in El Paso, and 8-year-old Felipe Gómez Alonzo died in a New Mexico hospital. All three children were from Guatemala and part of the mass exodus of Central American immigrants to the US in recent years.

Last November, Guatemala accounted for more immigrants in CBP custody than Mexico, despite the fact that the country is seven times smaller than Mexico.

The unnamed boy came from Camotán, a town near the country's border with Honduras known for its high levels of malnutrition where the impoverished population relies mostly on farming to survive.

The Trump Administration has complained in recent months that its border agencies are under-funded and overwhelmed by the number of migrants crossing the border. Early last month, the government agency responsible for jailing immigrant children, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), said it was going to detain the most youth in its history, with around 32,000 children taken in as of late March.

Southwest Key, the largest jailer of immigrant children in the US, won \$626 million in federal grants in 2018 and an additional \$86 million this year. The Casa Padre jail, where the teenager was imprisoned, had at least four sexual abuse allegations going back to 2017, according to documents from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Over the past decade Southwest Key received \$1.7 billion in grants according to a *New York Times* investigation. The founder resigned last March over questions of its mishandling of government funds.

The Trump Administration is requesting an additional \$4.5 billion in border funding for "humanitarian aid." The official request, which claims Health and Human Services will run out of funds by June, includes \$2.8

billion to increase jail capacity to about 23,600 total beds for unaccompanied children.

There were an estimated 50,036 unaccompanied children detained during the last budget year, with 35,898 children for this budget year so far. The highest number recorded was under the Obama administration in 2014 with 57,496 children held in custody.

The average stay in a government camp for children is 66 days, up from 59 in fiscal year 2018 and 40 in fiscal year 2016.

After the December deaths of the Guatemalan youth, the Trump administration promised reforms including more thorough medical checks in the camps. Federal officials have said the most recent death “will be subject to full review.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact