

Trump administration shipping immigrants to sanctuary cities as fifth child dies in ICE custody

Norisa Diaz
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Yesterday a 16-year-old Guatemalan youth died at a border patrol station in South Texas. He is the fifth migrant child to die in ICE custody since December. A week ago, on May 14, a 2-year-old toddler, also from Guatemala, died of pneumonia after he and his family were taken into custody at the El Paso, Texas, port of entry in April.

The names of the teen and toddler have yet to be released. The 16-year-old was found unresponsive at a border patrol station in Weslaco, Texas. The cause of death is currently unknown. Juan de León Gutierrez, also 16 years old, died April 30 after suffering from complications likely the result of an untreated sinus infection or head trauma.

These three deaths within the past month follow the December 30 death of 8-year-old Felipe Gómez Alonzo, who died while in ICE custody in El Paso, Texas, and 7-year-old Jakelin Caal, who died of dehydration and shock on December 8. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reports that 98,977 immigrants were apprehended at the US-Mexico border in April, the majority of them families and unaccompanied youth.

The tragic deaths of the five children underscore the brutality of the prison detention camps and xenophobic anti-immigrant policies celebrated by the Trump administration. At a campaign rally earlier this month in Panama City, Florida, President Donald Trump joked and laughed when one supporter called out that agents should just “shoot” migrants. Life is indeed cheap at the border.

The past week alone has seen a series of escalated assaults on immigrants. Last Tuesday the *Washington Post* revealed that a mass raid of over 10,000

immigrants across the nation was being secretly prepared. On Wednesday the Pentagon and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) revealed plans to build six massive tent internment camps to hold 7,500 immigrants near the US-Mexico border.

On Thursday the Trump administration unveiled its plan for a “merit-based” immigration system that would drastically reduce family-based visa applications and replace them with requirements based on education and skill. The class-based plan would also eliminate the visa lottery system, which allows 50,000 people the ability to migrate to the US each year.

And on Friday US Border Patrol began shipping hundreds of migrant families on flights from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas to San Diego, California for processing. The agency claims that its facilities in the Texas Rio Grande region are overburdened, with over 6,000 people in custody, nearly double their maximum capacity. It is also considering shipping migrants to Detroit, Michigan; Miami, Florida; and Buffalo, New York.

According to Douglas Harrison, the Border Patrol’s interim San Diego sector chief, CBP will send planes holding 120 to 135 migrants at least three times a week indefinitely to the border town.

Agents will collect biographical information and perform a medical screening before putting migrants on a plane to San Diego International Airport. From there they will sent to a US Customs and Immigration Services facility to be fingerprinted, interviewed and processed.

US authorities are currently using at least four buses a day to ship migrants 100 miles away to Laredo, Texas, from the McAllen-Brownsville area on the lower Rio

Grande. ICE also contracts a daily flight to ship over 100 migrants to Del Rio, Texas, about 275 miles away.

Harrison also noted that authorities are researching Detroit, Miami and Buffalo to determine whether nonprofit groups can sustain providing temporary assistance, placing the lion's share of the burden on humanitarian agencies.

The majority of families arriving at the southwest border are fleeing the impoverished and violence-ridden countries of Central America's Northern Triangle. They emerge from immigration prisons malnourished and in need of medical services, basic necessities, food and shelter. Charities provide the bulk of these basic necessities.

The San Diego Rapid Response Network (SDRRN), a coalition of religious and humanitarian groups, has been working to provide temporary shelter to asylum-seeking families since large-scale releases began last October. San Diego County has filed suit against the Trump administration to recover costs.

The SDRRN commented that the potential influx "underscores the urgent need for a permanent, long-term migrant shelter in San Diego."

The move by CBP to disperse thousands of immigrants on a weekly basis primarily to Democrat-controlled cities is to put pressure on the Democrats to stop posturing as if they disagree with the right-wing policies of the Trump administration.

Migrants are to be shipped to self-proclaimed "sanctuary cities," which provide a left cover to the Democratic political establishment, where ICE agents arrest and detain immigrants no less ruthlessly than Republican-controlled cities.

The move is part of a larger effort to overwhelm facilities and whip up xenophobic fervor in areas where support for immigrants dominates. The Port of San Ysidro at the San Diego, California/Mexico border is the most crossed border in the world. The attempt to push the resources of the city to the breaking point is part of a calculated effort to turn public sentiment against immigrants as city officials work to criminalize homelessness in an area with one of the highest costs of living in the country.

The same right-wing sentiments are being stoked across the border by Tijuana, Mexico, Governor Juan Manuel Gastélum, a member of the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), who has continually echoed

the xenophobia and nationalism of the Trump administration, referring to migrants as an "invasion" and a "horde."

While the Trump administration is stoking up right-wing chauvinism on both sides of the border, there has been nothing but deafening silence and tacit approval from the Democrats. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has provided the most tepid remarks against the merit-based policy, while also stating that Trump's border wall is "part of the immigration conversation."

Meanwhile, Vermont senator and 2020 Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders has echoed the concerns of the ruling elite underlying the merit-based system, stating, "You open the borders, there's a lot of poverty in this world, and you're gonna have people from all over the world."

The escalated attacks on immigrants must be placed within the context of revelations that the Trump administration is considering a nationwide militarized sweep to round up and arrest 10,000 immigrants, which would enact de facto martial law, requiring small armies to raid large cities, knock down doors and drag people from their homes.



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