

Leqaa Kordia, Palestinian detained for one year, suffers medical emergency at Texas ICE facility

Kevin Reed**9 February 2026**

On Friday, 33-year-old Palestinian immigrant Leqaa Kordia, who has been held by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for nearly a year, was hospitalized after falling at the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, Texas.

Although ICE has only confirmed her hospitalization, a formerly detained person said that Kordia suffered a medical emergency after she fainted, struck her head and experienced a seizure.

Her attorneys and family have described a desperate effort to locate her, calling at least 16 hospitals in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, all of which said they had no record of her as a patient. Advocacy groups note that during nearly a year in ICE custody she has repeatedly suffered dizziness, fainting episodes and other symptoms of malnutrition and medical neglect, which are well documented in Prairieland and other ICE facilities.

The secrecy surrounding her whereabouts and health condition is a calculated exercise in terror against Kordia and her loved ones and all those who oppose Washington's partnership in Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Kordia's ordeal began when she joined the mass protests at Columbia University against Israel's war on Gaza, despite not being a student there. She was working as a waitress in Paterson, New Jersey, and traveled to New York to participate in the encampment and demonstrations demanding an end to the genocide and divestment from Israel, driven by the fact that nearly 200 members of her extended family have been killed in Gaza.

She was arrested at a pro-Palestinian protest at Columbia in 2024, one of scores swept up by police in coordinated assaults on activists on campus. The local protest-related charges were subsequently dropped, a tacit recognition that she posed no threat and had engaged in constitutionally protected speech and assembly.

But on March 13–14, 2025, when she appeared for what was presented as a routine, voluntary immigration check-in at an ICE office in Newark, New Jersey, she was seized. ICE agents took her from the building, placed her in an unmarked vehicle, and transferred her more than 1,500 miles away in rural Texas at the Prairieland Detention Facility, a notorious private lockup

used to isolate immigrants and political detainees from their communities and legal support.

This method—luring people to “check-ins” or “interviews” and then disappearing them into distant detention centers—has become a standard tactic in the criminalization of immigrant workers and, increasingly, of political opponents of US policy. In Kordia's case, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) asserts that she overstayed a student visa, yet she had lived in the United States since 2016 and believed, on advice regarding her mother's US citizenship and her pending status, that she complied with the law.

The legal record in Kordia's case exposes the lawless character of her detention. An immigration judge has twice found that she should be released, ruling that she is not a flight risk and poses no danger to the community. Nonetheless, DHS and ICE have repeatedly used “administrative stays” and appeals to override those decisions and keep her imprisoned.

In January, Texas lawmakers described her ongoing incarceration as “illegal, punitive, and shameful,” in a letter to DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, explicitly linking it to her political activity and warning that it is part of an assault on First Amendment rights by the Trump administration.

Her attorneys have filed a habeas corpus petition in federal court, arguing that her continued detention despite judicial orders violates her First Amendment rights to free speech and protest and her Fifth Amendment rights to due process and freedom from arbitrary punishment.

The government has responded with McCarthyite smears. DHS and Noem have accused Kordia of having “ties to terrorist activities and Hamas” and claimed that money she sent to her family in Gaza constitutes material support for terrorism. Noem declared that those who “advocate for violence and terrorism” should lose the “privilege” of a visa. This language is meant to criminalize any denunciation of Israel's war crimes and to intimidate millions who oppose the genocide.

In an op-ed for *USA Today* last month, Kordia explained the real content of her detention. “Through my continued detention, the Trump administration aims to send a chilling message: People who speak out for Palestinian rights or

criticize Israel will face retribution,” she wrote. She stressed that her case is not an aberration but part of the “relentless assault on rule of law and human rights” that has accompanied the bipartisan support for Israel’s war.

According to Gaza health authorities, at least 72,027 Palestinians have been killed and 171,651 wounded since October 7, 2023, in Israel’s US-backed assault—a campaign that is genocidal not only in scale, but in its systematic destruction of housing, hospitals, schools and the means of life. Even after a nominal ceasefire in October 2025, hundreds more have been killed and thousands wounded, while the remaining hospitals function as little more than “waiting rooms” for the dying.

Kordia’s case is lesser known than those of Columbia students Mahmoud Khalil and Mohsen Mahdawi, whose ICE detentions provoked international outrage. Khalil, a lawful permanent resident and student organizer, was held for more than 100 days before a federal judge ordered his release, while Mahdawi was kidnapped by ICE at a citizenship appointment and held for over two weeks in 2025.

Khalil remains in the US while his immigration case continues, with the Trump administration attempting to arrest and deport him. He is also a defendant in a civil suit brought by October 7 attack victims against several pro-Palestinian groups.

Mohsen Mahdawi, a Palestinian Columbia student living in Vermont, was seized by Homeland Security agents in April 2025 just after passing his naturalization exam and taking the oath, on claims that his presence posed a serious foreign-policy concern. After his lawyers filed a habeas petition, a federal judge ordered his release on bond, stressing the harm caused by his two-week detention. He now lives in Vermont, can travel to New York for studies and legal meetings, and must comply with the requirements of immigration courts and federal courts while his removal case and broader legal challenge proceed.

When she was arrested, Kordia was a waitress in a Middle Eastern restaurant in Paterson, supporting herself and helping care for her autistic brother.

In response to her detention and isolation, support for Kordia has grown. Her case has been taken up by Muslim Advocates, Amnesty International, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and the Texas Civil Rights Project, which have all condemned her detention as retaliatory and unlawful.

In January, 34 Texas state legislators led by Representative Salman Bhojani signed a letter demanding her immediate release, calling her imprisonment part of a broader “crackdown on free speech and the criminalization of peaceful protest.” Members of Congress from New Jersey and Maryland have also written to DHS and ICE, stressing that she is being punished for “an honest mistake” over her visa and for participating in a “peaceful, nonviolent demonstration to honor her loved ones.”

On Friday, as news of her hospitalization emerged, family members, Texas lawmakers and supporters rallied outside the

Prairieland facility to demand her immediate release and information about her condition. Her attorney read a statement from Kordia to the crowd, in which she linked her suffering to that of the people of Gaza and denounced the attempt to silence her.

In her defiant statement she insisted that she had done nothing wrong, that her only “crime” was to speak openly about the genocide that murdered her relatives, and that she would not recant her opposition to Israel’s crimes or the US government’s complicity. She called on others not to be intimidated by her imprisonment and to continue the struggle for Palestinian freedom and for the rights of immigrants and workers in the United States.

Born in the occupied West Bank, Kordia came to the United States in 2016 on a student visa and later lived in Paterson, a working-class city in northern New Jersey with a large Arab and Muslim population. Her mother is a US citizen, and Kordia believed—incorrectly, as the government now claims—that seeking permanent residency through her mother meant she remained in lawful status even after she withdrew from formal studies.

In her *USA Today* op-ed, written from detention, Kordia explained that her case shows how “immigration enforcement has been weaponized to punish dissent” and to intimidate Palestinians and their supporters from speaking out. She appealed to everyone across the country to recognize that their own democratic rights are bound up with the fight against the Gaza genocide and the machinery of deportations, detention centers and police repression inside the United States.

The fight to free Leqaa Kordia, a political prisoner in the US, must be taken up by the American and international working class as part of the struggle against war, racism and authoritarianism. Her immediate release, the dropping of all proceedings against her and full redress for the crimes committed by ICE and DHS must become demands in the movement against Trump’s dictatorship and the capitalist system that sponsors it.



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