Expansion of Kansas detention facilities; protests against Missouri police serving as ICE enforcement

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As part of the rapid expansion of the US immigration enforcement apparatus, the Leavenworth, Kansas City commission voted 4–1 in early March to approve a permit allowing the private prison corporation CoreCivic to reopen a shuttered facility as an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center.

The Midwest Regional Reception Center facility has been closed since 2021 after its contract with the U.S. Marshals Service was not renewed amid mounting scandals over violence, understaffing and abuses that rendered it temporarily unprofitable. Its reopening under an ICE contract underscores the extent to which such facilities are not closed on principle but merely lie dormant until new revenue streams emerge.

The facility, which reportedly can hold 1,104 detainees, is expected to become one of the largest immigration detention sites in the Midwest. Its approval follows nearly a year of legal battles, protests and public hearings exposing the deep hostility among residents to the expansion of detention and deportation operations.

Opposition to the detention center has been ongoing since 2025, when CoreCivic first attempted to reopen the prison without local authorization. The city initially sued the company, forcing it to apply for a special-use permit and triggering a protracted legal and political struggle. Protests drew residents from across the Kansas City region. In February, more than 100 demonstrators rallied outside city hall demanding the proposal be rejected. During the final commission meeting, protesters again gathered in large numbers, with tensions spilling into the chamber as residents denounced the plan.

Civil rights organizations, including the American Civil Liberties Union, warned that reopening the facility would expand a detention system long associated with abuse, lack of oversight and inhumane conditions. Religious groups, local activists and former prison workers joined in opposition. Despite this, city officials approved the permit, citing the risk of costly litigation and the desire to impose regulatory conditions on the facility rather than lose control entirely.

The Leavenworth expansion is part of a broader federal effort to rapidly expand immigration detention capacity by reopening closed private prisons and contracting with corporations like CoreCivic. At the same time, the federal government is deepening collaboration with local law enforcement agencies through programs administered by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This dual strategy—expanding detention infrastructure while deputizing local police—marks a significant escalation in immigration enforcement and the repressive powers of the state.

At the center of this expansion is not only repression, but profit. Immigration detention has become a multibillion-dollar industry dominated by a handful of private corporations. CoreCivic and its chief competitor GEO Group derive a substantial portion of their revenues directly from ICE contracts, which generate hundreds of millions—and in some cases over a billion—dollars annually, binding immigration policy ever more directly to corporate financial interests.

These contracts are frequently structured to guarantee income regardless of how many people are actually detained. So-called “bed quotas” or minimum occupancy clauses require the government to pay for a fixed number of detention beds whether they are filled or not. By 2020, ICE was paying approximately $20 million per month for empty beds under such agreements.

More broadly, studies have found that a majority of private prison contracts require governments to maintain occupancy rates as high as 80 to 100 percent, effectively obligating authorities to keep facilities full. This creates a direct financial incentive to expand arrests and detentions in order to meet contractual thresholds.

At the South Texas ICE Processing Center, a privately operated facility run by GEO Group, contracts required ICE to maintain a daily minimum population—reported at one point to be 725 detainees—creating what watchdog groups have described as a de facto quota system.

Such arrangements expose the underlying logic of the entire detention expansion now underway. Facilities like the one in Leavenworth are not simply built in response to enforcement needs; they are part of a system in which detention itself is treated as a guaranteed revenue stream. The reopening of shuttered prisons, the rapid awarding of contracts and the push to increase capacity all reflect the alignment of government policy with corporate profit interests.

Branson, Missouri protests against police involvement in immigration enforcement

The implications of this policy were sharply revealed last month in Branson, Missouri, where hundreds of residents packed City Hall on February 10 to oppose a newly approved Section 287(g) agreement. Passed with less than 24 hours' public notice, the agreement authorizes local police to act as federal immigration agents—empowering them to "identify and remove" individuals suspected of lacking legal status. The measure was pushed by Police Chief Eric Schmitt, who justified it by citing alleged gang threats while acknowledging that authorities "couldn't prove" individuals were gang members—underscoring that enforcement would proceed on suspicion rather than demonstrable evidence.

Residents responded with outrage. Protesters carried signs reading "No ICE in Branson" and warned that the policy would erode constitutional protections, including due process and the presumption of innocence. Many expressed concern that the powers granted under 287(g) would be used arbitrarily, particularly against immigrants and low-income residents, while undermining trust in local institutions.

Section 287(g), a provision of the 1996 Immigration and Nationality Act, allows the federal government to deputize state and local law enforcement agencies to enforce immigration laws. After being scaled back in previous years amid widespread civil-rights concerns, the program has been aggressively expanded. Agreements now span hundreds of jurisdictions across more than 40 states, with over 1,000 memoranda signed as of late 2025. Independent estimates indicate that between 15,000 and 16,000 local officers have been granted immigration enforcement authority. Under the revived "task-force model," police are empowered to question individuals about their immigration status during routine encounters, detain them based on suspicion of civil immigration violations and transfer them to federal custody.

The connection between these developments is not incidental but systemic. In Leavenworth, detention capacity is being expanded and guaranteed through lucrative contracts. In Branson and hundreds of other cities, local police are being integrated into the enforcement pipeline that will supply detainees to fill these facilities. The result is a coordinated apparatus in which arrests, detention and deportation are increasingly organized according to financial imperatives.

The opposition that has emerged—from protests in Leavenworth to mass turnout in Branson—reflects growing anger among workers and youth at policies that threaten democratic rights and target vulnerable populations. Yet these struggles remain fragmented and localized, while the expansion of detention and deportation proceeds at the national level, backed by both major parties and powerful corporate interests.

The working class must draw the necessary conclusions. The fight against mass detention, deportation and the transformation of local police into agents of federal enforcement cannot be waged through appeals to the same institutions that are implementing these policies. It requires the independent mobilization of workers, students and young people across the country.

Rank-and-file committees must be built in workplaces, schools and communities to oppose 287(g) agreements, demand the closure of detention facilities such as the one in Leavenworth and put an end to the profit-driven system of immigrant detention. These committees must link struggles across cities and states, uniting opposition into a coordinated national movement against repression, exploitation and the subordination of human lives to corporate profit. The fight against the immigration enforcement apparatus is inseparably bound up with the struggle against the capitalist system itself, which gives rise to these policies and sustains them.