

Hundreds of immigrants illegally jailed in Michigan

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20 March 2026

In July 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) changed its position on mandatory detention, alerting its agents that any immigrant who had arrived in the US illegally could be subject to mandatory immigration detention. Prior to this change, mandatory detention without bond was largely reserved for immigrants who had committed serious violent or drug-related crimes in the United States.

The result is that thousands of immigrants have been placed in a position where they are ineligible for immigration bond hearings and are not permitted release from ICE detention until their removal from the United States, however long that takes. This policy change turns on legal hairsplitting of the definition of when an immigrant is “seeking admission” at the US border. Immigrants who are determined by DHS to be “seeking admission” are seen as neither having been “admitted” nor having been “not admitted” into the United States, and thus not permitted released from ICE detention once arrested.

As immigrants subject to the DHS’s new mandatory detention rules are unable to secure release from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention through traditional bond pathways, an enormous number of *habeas corpus* petitions have been filed in federal district courts. *Habeas corpus* is a legal right which dates back to the 1215 Magna Carta, permitting detained individuals to challenge the legality of their confinement by the government. It is specifically enshrined in Article I, Section 9, Clause 2 of the U.S. Constitution.

Habeas corpus is therefore not simply an element of American jurisprudence but a fundamental democratic right that dates back over 800 years. It is being employed now against severe administrative overreach and attacks on democratic rights. When a *habeas*

petition is granted, the detained person must either be released or a bond hearing must be granted by the government.

In Michigan federal courts prior to 2025, immigration-related *habeas* petitions were rare. Neither the Eastern nor Western District saw more than five cases per month between 2008 and September 2025. After the DHS widened the scope of immigrants who are subject to mandatory detention, this number spiked, with more than 800 *habeas* petitions filed between August 2025 and February 2026.

Despite the fact that more than 90 percent of these petitions have been granted, immigrants who are granted bond hearings by immigration courts, organized under the Department of Justice (DOJ), are routinely denied bond or given excessively high bond amounts, in blatant defiance of the spirit of federal court grants of *habeas corpus*.

A spokesperson for the DOJ denounced federal judges who disagree with immigration judges’ position on bond hearings for detained immigrants. Ignoring the blatant violations of democratic rights, he accused the federal judges of “throwing judicial temper tantrums and insulting the intelligence and professionalism of our dedicated corps of [immigration judges] with their activist rulings.”

The DOJ’s crowing about the “integrity and competence” of its immigration judges flies in the face of the brazenly ideological directives they have been given to deny as many asylum claims as possible. Immigration judges have unquestionably been given similar marching orders concerning immigration bond hearings.

The DHS’s attempt to widen the scope of mandatory immigration detention preceded its current push to expand detention centers across the United States. This

is a necessary outgrowth of the Trump regime's anti-immigrant pogrom and its broader attack on the working class. Underscoring this point are the increasing revelations of atrocious detention center conditions.

North Lake Detention Center in Baldwin, Michigan, the largest ICE detention center in the Midwest, has been the site of dozens of 911 dispatches since it was reopened on June 16, 2025. ICE blusters that the facility has "higher detention standards than most US prisons" and that all detainees are provided food, medical care and opportunities to speak with their lawyers and family. An ICE spokesperson ghoulishly stated to *MLive* that the medical care at detention centers is "the best healthcare that many aliens have received in their entire lives."

GEO Group, which runs North Lake Detention Center, denies that there are poor conditions at the facility, claiming it provides "high quality support services" and "around-the-clock" access to medical care. It claims that detainees have access to medical personnel and "off-site medical specialists, imaging facilities, emergency medical services, and local community hospitals."

North Lake Detention Center is located in a remote part of Northern Michigan, and the medical help it has repeatedly sought reportedly takes more than 40 minutes to arrive. The closest "local community hospital" to the facility is in Reed City, 20 miles away.

North Lake received a surge of hundreds of detainees as a result of Operation Midway Blitz in Chicago in late 2025, as well as other ICE operations across the United States, without the GEO Group having adequate staff to handle the influx. The number of detainees exploded from 400 in September 2025 to nearly 1,400 by the end of 2025, approaching the limit of the facility's 1,800 beds. Nearly two-thirds of emergency calls at North Lake were placed from October through December.

On November 22, a man who had been on suicide watch collapsed in his cell. Two weeks later, a medic was called for a man with "signs of appendicitis." On December 15, 911 was called because a detainee, Nenko Gantchev, had stopped breathing. He ultimately died. Another detainee suffered "irreversible damage" to his eyes because his six-month detention delayed a surgery. Yet another was the subject of a 911 call due

to a possible heart attack after North Lake failed to follow his medical treatment for high blood pressure and diabetes. A 23-year-old detainee attempted suicide on November 25 and was transferred to Cadillac Munson Hospital, 45 miles away.

An asylum seeker from Venezuela, arrested as he left his job at a poultry processing plant in Chicago on October 3, had undergone recent surgeries for a ureteral obstruction and was taking antibiotics to treat an infection before a third surgery. While at North Lake, the man requested medical care numerous times due to extreme abdominal pain. He informed staff about his kidney surgeries but was not given medication until his fourth visit to the infirmary, and then only medication to treat incontinence which he did not need and did not take. He was denied his antibiotics and painkillers for more than three weeks. The man was released on November 5 and required hospitalization to stop the infection and prevent sepsis. The man is currently suing the GEO Group in federal court for denial of "necessary and emergent" medical care.

The GEO Group has profited mightily from contracts with the US government, with profits increasing from \$32 million to \$254 million in 2025, a 700 percent increase. The federal government has paid GEO Group \$5.6 million for North Lake alone.



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