

ICE refuses to pay for medical care in its concentration camps

Anthony Callahan
8 September 2026

For more than eleven months, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has failed to pay third-party medical claims for people in its custody. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that ICE has not paid outside providers through the affected system since October 3, 2025, leaving hospitals and ambulance services owed millions of dollars and contributing to delayed or canceled medical appointments.

The payment breakdown began after the Department of Veterans Affairs ended its longstanding arrangement to process the claims. The VA acted under pressure from Republican lawmakers who alleged that the arrangement diverted resources from veterans. VA officials disputed that characterization because ICE reimbursed the department for the work.

ICE subsequently described the loss of its claims processor as an “absolute emergency” and hired Acentra Health to construct a replacement system. According to the *Chronicle*, Acentra had received \$40 million under a contract worth as much as \$67.5 million, but the replacement portal was still not operational as of August. Acentra’s website currently describes the portal as “coming soon” and says it has not begun processing claims. The Amica Center for Immigrant Rights has called the resulting restrictions a “death policy.”

The Republican complaint falsified the actual economics in order to manufacture a conflict between two sections of the working class: veterans and undocumented immigrants. It weaponized the legitimate grievances of veterans concerning VA underfunding, delayed appointments, rationed care, and increased privatization and redirected those grievances onto the most defenseless section of the working class rather than onto the economic system responsible for both.

This manufactured conflict served to cut services for both sections: ICE stopped paying medical providers entirely, leaving detainees to suffer and die, while the veterans—framed as the “winners” of this conflict—gained nothing. No additional resources were diverted to the VA. Instead, \$40 million flowed to Acentra Health for a system that does not exist.

The results are a matter of record. At least 57 people had died in ICE custody since January 2025 as of early September. A Human Rights Watch and Physicians for Human Rights investigation of the first 52 deaths documented systemic failures in medical screening, staffing, mental-health services and access to outside care.

ICE’s own 2025 national detention standards require “medically necessary and appropriate medical, dental and mental health care and pharmaceutical services at no cost” to detainees. Investigations have repeatedly documented violations of this standard, and the payment breakdown has created an additional barrier to meeting it. Detainees have been directly charged thousands of dollars for medication and care they are legally entitled to receive free.

The *Chronicle*’s investigation documented the human cost in individual cases. Rodrigo, a 58-year-old green card holder who had lived in the United States for 52 years, was arrested on the basis of a decade-old conviction that has since been vacated. He had undergone chemotherapy for throat cancer and was awaiting an oncologist’s evaluation of a new

lump when ICE arrested him. Detention medical staff requested an outside oncology evaluation in January 2026; ICE refused for months while simultaneously attempting to deport him. A reviewing physician stated that such delay was “not even close” to the medical standard of care for advanced laryngeal cancer. Rodrigo was released in August only after a judge ruled his arrest illegal, and was hospitalized only days later for a brain aneurysm caused by a blood clot in his tumor, he told the *Chronicle*.

Daniel, 44, an asylum-seeker with brain cancer, went without his anti-seizure medication for three days after arriving at California City Detention. On a separate occasion, his medication was delivered at 3 a.m. while he slept and he was marked a “no show.” He suffered four seizures in a month. Medical staff requested an outside MRI and oncology appointment; ICE refused financial authorization. Three physicians reviewing his records said the agency’s actions threatened his life and increased the risk of permanent brain damage. Daniel was released through habeas corpus in April 2026, by which point his tumor had grown aggressively. He underwent brain surgery in June.

But the pattern extends far beyond the cases the *Chronicle* documented, and it was established long before the current payment freeze. The *World Socialist Web Site* reported in September on the imprisonment of Loreto Javar, a 76-year-old green card holder with stage 4 prostate cancer who was kidnapped by ICE agents at his own citizenship interview in Washington state. According to his daughter, Javar missed multiple oncology appointments, developed a blood clot and suffered rapid weight loss while detained at the privately operated Northwest ICE Processing Center in Tacoma.

The Philippine Embassy confirmed on September 2 that Javar had been released on recognizance following its request that ICE consider his case on humanitarian and medical grounds. His deportation proceedings remain pending, and he is required to report for scheduled hearings.

In response to inhumane conditions, the Tacoma detention center has seen 20 hunger strikes led by detainees this year, including one involving more than 140 detainees who refused food for nearly a week to protest inedible meals and the denial of medical care.

Those strikes are part of a broader wave. In April, hundreds of detainees at the North Lake Processing Center in Michigan staged a hunger strike over abusive conditions and indefinite detention.

In May, ICE agents brutalized protesters outside a New Jersey detention center where 300 detainees were waging a hunger and labor strike. A review by the California Department of Justice issued in May found that “medical and detention staffing levels failed to meet the needs of the surge of detainees,” and that detainees were “unable to access requested medical appointments” and “did not receive necessary and timely medical treatment, even for emergency medical care.” The report documented a cascade of failures: untimely health screenings, delayed referrals for chronic conditions, delayed medication delivery, and facilities that failed to increase staffing as the detainee population exploded.

The non-payment of medical providers is the same logic that governs

the entire detention apparatus. The *Texas Observer* recently published an investigation of Camp East Montana, the largest immigrant detention facility in the country, on the Fort Bliss military base in El Paso.

The original lead contractor at Camp East Montana, a small company called Acquisition Logistics, was contracted for \$1.26 billion without a Quality Assurance Surveillance Plan, the mechanism that would have allowed financial penalties for violations, because of the “expedited time frames” for opening the facility. When that contract was terminated, ICE handed management to Amentum Services, a multibillion-dollar defense contractor, with no competitive bidding. In July, ICE extended Amentum’s no-bid contract for another year at more than \$776 million, potentially through September 2027, on the claim that only Amentum could manage the facility. Amentum’s corporate lineage runs through DynCorp, a military contractor that was forced to pay \$21 million to settle a False Claims Act suit over inflating the costs of training Iraqi police. A war profiteer now turned detention profiteer, the interconnection between imperialist aggression abroad and dictatorship domestically could not be more clear.

A Government Accountability Office audit found the Army and ICE paid as much as \$19 million for unused services under the contract. That included as much as \$11.5 million before detainees arrived, approximately \$423,000 for unused meals during the initial period and approximately \$7.1 million after ICE assumed the contract. Meanwhile, detainees reported drastic weight loss and being “fed cookies, candies and potato chips in lieu of meals.”

The pretense that the attacks on immigrants only target “illegal aliens” is also refuted by the record. US citizens, such as Brian Morales Garcia, have been deported. Deportation flights to Haiti have carried children born in the United States, citizens expelled from their own country alongside their parents. ICE has made approximately 150,000 arrests between June and August. The majority of these people had no criminal conviction or pending charge, underscoring that the ultimate target is not just “criminals” but the entire working class, regardless of immigration status.

The growing deportation apparatus under Trump is not new and is not solely the responsibility of the Republican Party. ICE was created under George W. Bush, expanded under Obama — whose administration set deportation records and built the family detention camps — and accelerated under both Trump and the Biden administrations.

The Democratic Party, no less than the Republicans, built and funded the deportation apparatus now being expanded, and has cleared the way for ICE and Customs and Border Protection to receive tens of billions of dollars in additional funding through 2029 without a single binding restriction.

When Trump returned to the White House, 46 House Democrats and 12 Senate Democrats voted for the Laken Riley Act, which expanded mandatory immigration detention. In March 2025, 10 Senate Democrats provided the votes needed to advance a Republican continuing resolution funding the government while Trump and Elon Musk implemented the Department of Government Efficiency cuts and prepared the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. Most recently, 176 House Democrats backed legislation funding federal agencies through December 11. These votes maintained the government and its immigration-enforcement agencies as ICE and Customs and Border Protection received tens of billions of dollars for further expansion.

This record also includes elected officials affiliated with the Democratic Socialists of America. New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who previously called for abolishing ICE, reaffirmed on August 24 his support for House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries’ bid to become speaker. Jeffries has proposed cosmetic changes to ICE kidnapping operations, such as wearing body cameras, but rejected calls to abolish the agency.

Mamdani’s administration subsequently dismissed dozens of Haitian city employees after the Trump administration terminated Temporary

Protected Status and their federal work authorization expired. Mamdani appealed to Trump to restore TPS, but his administration did not mount a legal challenge to protect the affected workers.

The immigration detention system is an extension of the existing carceral state. The United States accounts for roughly 4 percent of the world’s population and holds roughly 20 percent of the world’s prisoners, and its prisons are aimed squarely at the poor and the working class.

After campaigning on “defunding the police,” Mamdani has embraced the New York Police Department. At a September 2 Bronx roll call, held two days after police fatally shot Pamela Cisneros, he declared that the NYPD had “worked around the clock to keep New York City safe” and said he was “grateful for their service today and every day.” Following the September 4 police killing of Chaun Bottom, Mamdani praised officers for attempting “to de-escalate” the encounter and deferred to an internal investigation.

The police, the immigration Gestapo, and the military are instruments of a single system of capitalist class rule, and its escalating violence is directed at one target: the working class, native-born and immigrant alike.

The veteran whose VA care is rationed and the detainee whose oncology referral is denied are both victims of the same ruling class and the same capitalist system. The divisions the ruling class manufactures — veteran against immigrant, citizen against “illegal,” “taxpayer” against “alien” — can only be understood as a tactic of a class war waged by the ruling class against the working class.

These conditions cannot be ameliorated by petitioning the capitalist state for greater oversight, more humane detention, or compliance with its own standards. Nor can they be resolved by electing “progressive” or even self-proclaimed “socialist” Democrats.

The immediate and unconditional release of every detainee, the closure of the concentration camps, and the abolition of ICE, Customs and Border Protection, and the Department of Homeland Security can be achieved only through the independent political mobilization of the working class through the building of rank-and-file committees.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact