

Salvadoran man dies in Georgia concentration camp amid ongoing hunger strike

Jacob Crosse
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In a statement issued on October 24, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) confirmed that a 48-year-old man from El Salvador, Luis Sandoval, died inside the Folkston D. Ray James ICE processing center, a 3,000-bed complex in Georgia on October 23.

According to the agency, Sandoval was kidnapped by agents on October 2 and arrived at the former jail-turned-concentration camp on October 8, 2026. Fifteen days later, ICE officials claim they found him with a ligature around his neck. They wrote in a statement that staff found Sandoval at around 1:46 a.m. and that he was pronounced dead by Charlton County Emergency Medical Services roughly 42 minutes later, at 2:28 a.m.

For the last 20 days, several detainees at the facility run by The GEO Group, which operated as a prison for decades, have been on a hunger strike to protest their conditions and continued imprisonment. It is unclear as of this writing if Sandoval was participating in the hunger strike.

In a courageous video issued earlier this month, the hunger strikers, who include fathers and husbands of US citizens, asylum seekers and immigrants who have committed no crimes, detailed conditions at the for-profit facility and efforts by the Trump administration to subvert their democratic rights. Mujtaba Qeyami, an asylum seeker imprisoned at the facility for 20 months, said most of the people in the former jail came to the United States “seeking protection from political persecution and violence in their home countries,” only to find themselves incarcerated in the United States.

Idris Makhmudov, one of the leaders of the hunger strike, said he had been imprisoned at the facility for over 27 months. After launching the hunger strike, Makhmudov was promptly deported to Russia. In an

interview with NPR before he was deported, Makhmudov said that “prisons can be better because you know when you’ll be out. In here, what kills you more every day, that you don’t know when all this [is] going to be changed.”

In a statement released on October 26, Asian Americans Advancing Justice claimed 500 people were participating in the hunger strike at the start of the month, and at least 12 people were still protesting their conditions by refusing food. The statement noted that those participating in the strike “have faced solitary confinement and are now being threatened with force feeding, both widely considered torture.”

In an interview with *Migrant Insider*, published on October 23, Polina Chertushkina, wife of Andrei Gerdiukov, a Russian asylum seeker currently participating in the hunger strike at Folkston, said her husband was not able to call her on October 23 because a man held in the jail’s medical unit died that day.

Chertushkina told *Insider* she had spoken to her husband in a video call for the first time in two weeks the day prior. He told her that he has lost 19 pounds, dropping from 204 to 185 pounds, and that medical staff were threatening to force feed him with tubes if he and the others did not begin eating.

US military personnel and prison staff have long used force-feeding as a form of torture to try and break those protesting their conditions or imprisonment. The procedure involves strapping people to chairs and inserting tubes, sometimes longer than 43 inches, down their throats, through their nose or rectum.

The Folkston facility is notorious for horrendous and deadly conditions. On April 15, 2024, Jaspal Singh, a 57-year-old who had spent nine months imprisoned at

the jail, became unresponsive inside the facility and later died at a nearby hospital. A review by ICE found the facility's lack of medical care provided to Singh "deviated beyond safe limits and directly contributed to his death."

Throughout April, Singh complained of chest pain and was finally given an electrocardiogram on April 15, 2024. There was no doctor on site at the facility, so even though the EKG scan found "abnormal" readings, nothing was done; an off-site doctor did not find the readings serious and scheduled a medical appointment for the following day. Roughly an hour later, Singh was found unresponsive. On-site staff attempted to resuscitate Singh until an ambulance arrived some 30 minutes later. Singh was transported to a local hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Sandoval is at least the 60th person to have died while in ICE custody since Donald Trump returned to the White House and at least the 300th person to have died in custody since the agency was created in 2003.

From October 1, 2003 through September 18, 2026 UCLA Law's Behind Bars Data Project recorded 297 deaths in ICE custody. This figure they note "is likely the floor," as ICE "sometimes" releases people from custody with critical illnesses so that their deaths "are not reflected in our data."

Three additional deaths have been made public September 18, including most recently Sandoval, Julián Curo Churata, 47, on September 29 and Emiliano Andrade-Covarrubias, 56, on October 17.

In an email to the *Baltimore Banner*, Max Schoening, an attorney for Curo Churata's wife, Verónica Ramírez, and their six-year-old daughter, wrote their firm was investigating "credible information that guards at Richwood Correctional Center ignored urgent requests for medical attention for Mr. Curo Churata." Churata had lived in Laurel, Maryland, for about 17 years before he was kidnapped by ICE this past on June 27, 2026 while on the way to work.

A GoFundMe in support of Churata states that the husband and father of two was a "hardworking man," who "did everything he was asked [by] and attended all his court dates." He was "very healthy so when he started feeling very sick in detention, he asked for medical attention, but was ignored," the statement continued.

ICE confirmed that while in custody in Louisiana,

Curo Churata volunteered to be deported to Peru. His request was denied on September 18 and less than two weeks later he was dead.

Andrade-Covarrubias, a lawful permanent resident, died earlier this month at the Rio Grande Processing Center in Laredo, Texas. Similar to Singh and Curo Churata, family members of Andrade-Covarrubias have stated that he did not receive proper medical care while in ICE custody. In an interview with the *Texas Tribune* earlier this month, Andrade-Covarrubias' daughter, Estefani Andrade, said that her father had diabetes, high blood pressure and a heart condition, yet staff at the facility refused to "give him his medications."

Andrade told the *Tribune* her father had previously been hospitalized for COVID-19 in 2021, which still affected him greatly. Despite pleading for his medication, Andrade said staff at the facility "would just ignore him."

Speaking to the *New York Times*, Andrade said her father, an apartment and townhouse painter, had lived in the Dallas area for decades, raising three children all born in the US. He was kidnapped by Customs and Border Protection in June while returning from Mexico by bus. The immigration Gestapo justified the kidnapping by claiming that Andrade-Covarrubias lied on immigration paperwork by failing to disclose a 2004 arrest while applying for residency.

Andrade said her father had been a legal US resident for about 10 years and often made the trip to Mexico without incident. Texas Representative Henry Cuellar told the *Times* that the family, as well as Mexican consulate officials, confirmed Andrade-Covarrubias was a legal US resident.

The last time Andrade spoke to her father she said, "He was coughing. He didn't look like himself." She asked if he was okay, and he replied "they don't listen to me."



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