

WHAT IS IT REALLY LIKE TO BE IN ICE DETENTION?

EXCLUSIVE INSIGHTS FROM
TWO LOUISIANA IMMIGRATION
DETENTION FACILITIES



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE
JUDICIARY
Ranking Member Dick Durbin

Published May 19, 2025

FACT SHEET: IMMIGRATION DETENTION OVERSIGHT

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BACKGROUND

Staff for Senate Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Durbin visited two Louisiana immigration detention facilities on April 23 and 24, where, among hundreds of others, Tufts University student Rümeyza Öztürk and recent Columbia University graduate Mahmoud Khalil were detained. The visits are part of an ongoing Committee investigation of immigration detention focused on medical and mental health care, treatment in segregation, and access to counsel. Ms. Öztürk, who was recently released from detention, was held at South Louisiana ICE Processing Center in Basile, Louisiana. Mr. Khalil continues to be detained at Central Louisiana ICE Processing Center in Jena, Louisiana. Both facilities are managed by the private prison company GEO Group. Detention conditions in the Louisiana detention facilities have been the subject of criticism, including a scathing report issued last year that described medical neglect and abusive and discriminatory treatment.

Eight individuals already have died in ICE custody since the start of this Administration. Three deaths occurred in just over a month at the start of Trump’s presidency—the most deaths during a similar time period since 2020.

KEY OBSERVATIONS FROM STAFF VISITS TO THE LOUISIANA FACILITIES

The Trump Administration has begun detaining larger numbers of pregnant women in facilities ill-equipped to manage their well-being and safety.

Despite an existing directive that pregnant women generally should not be detained, the Administration apparently has ended this presumption of release and is detaining pregnant women on a case-by-case basis using new, unpublished criteria. Circumstances now considered in a release decision apparently include the estimated length of custody and how far along a pregnancy is. According to GEO staff at the South Louisiana ICE Processing Center, there were *14 pregnant women detained at the facility* at the time of Committee staff’s visit.

Detainees at the facility expressed serious concern for pregnant women and most agreed they were not receiving adequate care.

One woman who was four months pregnant had experienced bleeding and reportedly had not seen a doctor in months. In one instance, she went to the medical unit and *waited for hours* but was never seen by a medical staff. Another woman, two months pregnant, stated she also had not yet seen a physician in the facility. Many of the women present shared the story of a pregnant

woman who had a miscarriage while detained and was allegedly still bleeding when she was deported.

Individuals suffering from serious medical conditions struggled to receive adequate care, including easily accessible over-the-counter medications.

Several women described medical concerns that went untreated or that they felt were not adequately treated, including high blood pressure, heart issues, stomach pain, and cancer. Many waited hours for medical appointments, did not receive prescribed medication, and often could not see a doctor in emergencies. Several women described longstanding medical conditions and noted that for the first time in their lives, they were not receiving necessary prescriptions for issues such as diabetes and high blood pressure. *One woman with breast cancer feared she was not receiving adequate treatment and said she had waited for a year to be deported to her home country to restart such treatment.*

Cruelty and neglect are core to Trump’s detention and deportation agenda and were present in treatment by facility staff.

In one egregious incident at Basile, *a detained woman’s finger was severed in a door by accident.* Multiple witnesses saw a guard laugh at the woman despite her visible injury. A supervisor later intervened, and the woman was treated at a local hospital. *After the woman left for treatment, the witnesses described facility staff passing the severed piece of her finger around for different staff members to observe “like a trophy.”*

Staff learned that, despite her injury, the woman was placed in a segregation unit following an altercation with another individual in her housing unit (known as “pods”). Though she had been prescribed medication four times a day, she alleged that she had only been given medication twice a day despite repeated requests.

Immigrants face extended detention even after prevailing in their immigration cases, which raises basic questions about due process and the misuse of taxpayer dollars.

Multiple detainees described being held after prevailing in their immigration cases, including a positive credible fear finding, a positive finding from an immigration judge, and, in one case, prevailing in an appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals. Detainees often must advocate for their release even after they are found eligible to stay in the United States. For example, Mr. Khalil shared the story of a friend in detention who had prevailed in his immigration appeal to the Board of Immigration Appeals but was detained for another month before being released.

The Trump Administration’s decision to shut down the duly authorized Legal Orientation Program (LOP) is a direct attack on detained individuals’ due process rights.

LOP is one of the few opportunities for detained individuals to learn about our complex immigration system, including the removal process and forms of available immigration relief. A comprehensive study found LOP cases closed faster than comparable non-LOP cases, creating efficiencies that are now absent since the Administration has terminated the program despite bipartisan Congressional support and appropriations. Many individuals at the Jena and Basile facilities were unrepresented, did not know how to seek an attorney, and assumed they could not afford an attorney. At Basile, ICE even stopped showing an LOP video that explained to detainees the basic rights and processes available to them.

The Trump Administration’s purge of DHS oversight offices reduces opportunities for those seeking health care or experiencing abuse in custody to report complaints.

The women at Basile noted they previously were able to raise concerns with a government official who visited the facility and regularly met with detainees. These visits have recently stopped. This may be because the Administration has removed almost all staff from the Office of Immigration Detention Oversight (OIDO) and the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), two of the primary offices statutorily charged with conducting oversight of conditions in these facilities. ICE personnel and facility staff did not know if OIDO could still receive inquiries from individuals or if individuals detained at the facilities were still able to successfully reach out to OIDO through the telephone number posted on the wall. The practical impact is that individuals have few options for sharing concerns and grievances with entities other than GEO and ICE.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE DETAINED STUDENTS

As they both grapple with the uncertainty of their own immigration cases, Ms. Öztürk and Mr. Khalil remain focused on the needs of individuals who are detained with them.

“They treat us like animals.” – Rumeysa Öztürk

Ms. Öztürk described inadequate medical care, callous and abusive facility staff, and a sense of shared despair rooted in the dehumanizing experience of immigration detention. For example, she described how facility staff require women to line up as early as 2 a.m. to receive their weekly roll of toilet paper. She described neglectful treatment by medical staff, including the failure to receive timely treatment for her asthma attacks. As a result, she has stopped reporting all her asthma attacks. Though she had worked with Syrian refugees in camps in Turkey, Ms. Öztürk felt that nothing she had seen in those camps compared to the conditions in the Basile facility.

“The moment you walk into Jena, your rights remain outside.” – Mahmoud Khalil

Mr. Khalil spoke about pods so frigid that individuals hang plastic bags between the top and bottom bunks to insulate themselves from the cold; the guards, however, call the bags a “security risk” and always remove them. He hopes to improve daily life for his fellow detainees through continued advocacy—suggesting easy solutions like raising the temperature in sleeping pods and improving food quality—and raised serious concerns about due process for immigration detainees.

Mr. Khalil and Ms. Öztürk have witnessed how these facilities function as prisons and those detained for allegedly violating civil immigration laws are treated like criminals. Despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges, Mr. Khalil and Ms. Öztürk expressed deep admiration for those who endure the detention system and fight for justice in their cases.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- President Trump is desperate to increase his deportation numbers. To further his cruel agenda, billions of taxpayer dollars are paid to private corporations who detain vulnerable individuals, noncitizens who have prevailed in their immigration cases, and others who have not committed a crime, present no threat to our communities, and often have deep roots in this country.
- Pregnant women, families, and other vulnerable individuals are detained in these facilities without adequate care and are at risk of serious illness and even death.
- The Trump Administration has gutted congressionally mandated oversight, firing most DHS staff responsible for conducting detention oversight and leaving individuals in immigration detention with few avenues to file complaints regarding abuse or neglect.
- The Trump Administration has ended funding for legal orientation programming, leaving most detainees without basic education on their rights or resources to expeditiously resolve their claims.
- These isolated facilities are now being used by President Trump to disappear individuals who have committed no crimes, like Rümeyşa Öztürk, Mahmoud Khalil, and Dr. Bader Suri Khan.
- President Trump's needlessly cruel approach to immigration detention does not make our communities safer. Rather, at the expense of taxpayer dollars, it intentionally targets the vulnerable and punishes those who have committed no crimes.