



“You’re Only Getting Out Deported or Dead”

Abusive US Immigration Detention at Ft. Bliss

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Summary

I have never felt racism the way I have felt it inside this camp. When I first got here the guards told me, “When you get to El Paso, Texas, there’s no going back. You’re only getting out deported or dead.”

— Javier C., interviewed in Ft. Bliss, Texas, December 2025

Camp East Montana is the nation’s largest immigration detention center, with the current capacity to hold up to 5,000 people.¹ It is located on the grounds of Fort Bliss, a US military base with headquarters in El Paso, Texas. Camp East Montana consists of five “soft sided” tent-like structures, which house detained people in cell-like pods.

Human Rights Watch and the ACLU found that people detained at Camp East Montana endured conditions of confinement that amounted to enforced disappearance, cruel, degrading and inhuman treatment, excessive use of force including one extrajudicial killing, life-threatening medical neglect, barriers to legal representation, and coercive third-country removals. Together, these abuses violate fundamental protections under US and international human rights law.

In interview after interview, detained people told Human Rights Watch that they were beaten by guards, denied necessary medical care, and prevented from contacting family members or lawyers. One woman told us guards and nurses denied her emergency medical care, and she is at risk of losing her vision permanently as a result. Another man said guards groped his testicles during beatings and placed him in solitary confinement arbitrarily. Many detainees told us facility guards denied them outdoor recreation for weeks at a time, in extreme cases leaving them without sunlight or any outdoor recreation for over a month.

Detained people described overcrowded housing areas, bathrooms covered in feces and urine, and living quarters flooded with dirty water and dust. They told us they developed infections and other health complications because the facility failed to clean living spaces,

¹ TRAC Immigration Report, Detention Facilities Average Daily Population, <https://tracreports.org/immigration/detentionstats/facilities.html> (accessed March 31, 2026).

did not have adequate ventilation, and did not provide basic hygiene supplies, including soap and hand sanitizer.

Ismael M., 28, from Honduras, was detained at Camp East Montana for over five months. Ismael told Human Rights Watch that he had experienced depressive episodes and suicidal thoughts because of his prolonged detention and the inhumane conditions he was subjected to:

I sometimes look at my bed sheets, and I wonder if it would be easier to hang myself instead of trying to survive this torture. I don't know how to describe what I'm feeling. I feel forgotten. People have died here and no one cares. I've gone a month without seeing the sun.... I am forced to live in filth.... I have been taken from my family, from my home, and I know that no matter how long they keep me here, they will end up deporting me. I'm so afraid I will get killed once I am sent back. That is why I left. I can't sleep most nights, that's when I have the hardest time.

When we asked if he had sought or been referred to mental health care at Camp East Montana, Ismael said that he had been taken to the onsite counselor a handful of times. He said the counselor prescribed sleeping pills, told him to engage in breathing exercises, and to visualize his “happy place” when he had trouble sleeping or experienced anxiety.

Ismael said, “What good does it do to imagine a ‘happy place’? How absurd for a supposed medical professional to suggest that I could close my eyes, take deep breaths, and escape my reality when I am forced to survive here. When my reality is probably going end with my death in my home country. Sleeping pills won't fix that.”²

The abuses documented in this report occurred within the broader context of the US government's expansion of immigration detention. Since the beginning of the second Trump administration, federal authorities have dramatically increased immigration arrests through workplace raids, neighborhood enforcement operations, traffic stops, and arrests

² Human Rights Watch interview with Ismael M., El Paso, Texas, January 2026.

at USCIS field offices, with the stated goal of expanding detention capacity on an unprecedented scale.

Many detained at Camp East Montana were arrested near their place of work or their homes, apprehended during enforcement operations, ICE raids, and traffic stops and other routine encounters with local law enforcement, including at USCIS Field Offices. One man told us police arrested him after his car was rear-ended by a driver who failed to stop for a traffic light.

Most of the people we interviewed said they had a valid work permit. When they presented their documents, arresting officers falsely told them that their work authorization did not establish legal presence in the US. Subsequently, most were taken to local jails or holding facilities, often violently, before being transferred by plane to Camp East Montana. Many told us they felt like they were kidnapped.

Detained people said they were held incommunicado after their arrest, unable to contact family members or attorneys. Department of Homeland Security systems, including the online Detainee Locator, often failed to indicate where they were being held and, in some cases, did not reflect that they were in detention at all. Family members searching for loved ones frequently received no meaningful information from DHS. In some of the cases documented by Human Rights Watch, these practices amounted to enforced disappearance under international human rights law.

The abuses at Camp East Montana continue a troubling history of confinement at Fort Bliss. During World War II, Fort Bliss was one of several Texas military bases used as an incarceration camp for people of Japanese descent, as well as some German and Italian immigrants.³ In 2021, under the administration of President Joe Biden, Fort Bliss was also used by the US government to detain unaccompanied children who arrived at the US-Mexico border. Government investigators reported the treatment children endured at Fort Bliss hindered case management and adversely affected their safety and well-being.

³ National Park Service (NPS), Preserving WWII Internment History in Texas, June 6, 2019, (accessed March 31, 2026), available at: <https://www.nps.gov/articles/ooo/preserving-wwii-internment-history-in-texas.htm>.

In April 2026, an ICE internal investigation identified violations of federal detention standards, including unreported uses of force, medical neglect, failures to conduct required suicide and wellness checks, inadequate sexual abuse prevention measures, unanswered grievances, and systemic failures to process detainee requests for assistance. This report's findings corroborate many of these same patterns of government abuse.

Recommendations

To the US Executive

Shift Toward Humane, Rights-based Alternatives to Detention

- End the use of Ft. Bliss and other military assets to detain and deport people in US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody.
- Replace immigration detention with community-based case management programs that provide holistic services, including legal aid, housing, and employment assistance, or, as necessary, with the least intrusive forms of supervision and monitoring to ensure compliance with immigration proceedings and removal.
- Direct ICE to refrain from detaining people participating in the processes authorities have laid out for them, including routine check-ins at field offices, showing up to court hearings, applying for asylum and other forms of immigration relief.
- Release vulnerable populations such as pregnant people, elderly people, and people with serious medical conditions from detention.

Ensure Accountability and Independent Oversight

- Investigate the contractors responsible for building and operating Camp East Montana at Ft. Bliss for violations of domestic and international standards of confinement.
- Retain or reinstate all congressionally designated independent oversight bodies—such as the Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman (OIDO) and the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)—and strengthen their capacity through staffing and resources to monitor detention conditions, ensure access to adequate complaint procedures, investigate abuses, and ensure accountability for rights violations.
- Retain or reinstate Congressional oversight authority, including the right to announced and unannounced oversight visits, without time limits or other restrictions on which areas of the facility Members can inspect and which detained individuals members can speak to.

Prevent Further Harm and Abuse, and Safeguard the Wellbeing of Immigrants

- To the maximum extent permitted by law, direct ICE to use immigration detention only as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible duration.
- If detention cannot be avoided, ensure access to reasonable accommodations and the necessary medical treatment to safeguard health and maintain dignified conditions.
- Prohibit the use of solitary confinement in immigration detention facilities.

To the US Congress

Remedy and Prevent Ongoing Harm and Rights Violations in Immigration Detention

- Eliminate mandatory immigration detention. Ensure that any decision to detain a person is based on an individualized assessment subject to judicial review and prioritization of alternatives to detention.
- Immediately reduce harms by passing binding detention standards that ensure constitutional treatment of detained people.
- Exercise meaningful oversight of existing standards, including ICE/DRO Detention Standards, and the 2025 National Detention Standards (NDS 2025).
- Hold ICE accountable for meeting specific standards outlined in the National Detention Standards (NDS) for all non-dedicated facilities, and the Performance Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) for all ICE custody dedicated facilities with regard to provision of care and data reporting, including through additional reporting requirements and funding conditions.

Ensure Congressional Oversight of Detention Facilities

- Ensure all congressionally designated independent oversight bodies— such as the OIDO, DHS Office of Inspector General, and DHS CRCL— have adequate funding and the capacity, staff, and resources needed to effectively monitor detention conditions, ensure detainees have access to adequate complaint procedures, investigate abuses, and ensure accountability for violations of detainees' rights.

- Reinstatement and expansion of appropriations for the Legal Orientation Program and ensure that the program is available in all immigration detention facilities where immigrants are held for longer than a 72-hour period.
- Immediately conduct robust oversight of ICE detention, including through use of subpoena authority and investigations into the conditions documented in this report and asking the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Congressional Research Services (CRS) to investigate immigration detention conditions.
- Establish a special or select congressional committee to investigate deaths in ICE custody, healthcare services, including mental health services, and the use of solitary confinement in immigration detention.
- Pass legislation requiring timely and appropriate healthcare, including mental health services, for all detainees, with oversight mechanisms to prevent neglect and abuse.
- Pass legislation that prohibits the use of solitary confinement in immigration detention facilities, including for people with psychosocial disabilities (mental health conditions), as its prolonged use constitutes cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and can amount to torture.

To the US Department of Homeland Security

- End use of military bases domestically and abroad, federal and state prisons, local jails, and other current or former criminal incarceration facilities—including those privately owned and operated—for civil immigration detention.
- Absent exceptional circumstances, refrain from detaining people with serious medical and mental health conditions.
- Ensure that all ICE detention operations conform with applicable international human rights and national immigration detention standards.

Remedy Ongoing and Systemic Failures in Health, Hygiene, and Custodial Care, and Redress Harms Already Inflicted

- Amend the Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) 2011, the NDS 2019, the NDS 2025, and the NDS 2026 to include more detailed treatment

standards, and reintegrate the provisions laid out in the 2008 ICE/DRO Detention Standards around “Hold Rooms” (referred to in this report as processing cells).

- Provide necessities, including menstrual and other hygiene products and adequate bedding, and limit the duration of confinement in holding cells to prevent inhumane conditions.
- Ensure all people in immigration detention have access to timely, quality healthcare, including mental health services and regular distribution of all prescribed medications.
- Ensure staff working at detention facilities uphold timely and appropriate health care standards, including for mental health care, for all detainees, with oversight mechanisms to prevent neglect and abuse.
- Provide reasonable accommodations and auxiliary aids and services to detained people with disabilities, including assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, and hearing aids, among other devices, and professional personal assistance for daily living tasks for people who need such services.
- Train staff in trauma-informed care to appropriately support detainees, including asylum seekers, who have experienced trauma and ensure mental health services are easily accessible, are of good quality, and non-punitive.
- Ensure all detention facilities have appropriate staffing for their health services, including mental health services, and examine and publicly disclose whether health services positions are filled or vacant as a compliance component during inspections by ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) and OIDO.
- As part of inspections, interview detainees directly about all aspects in their conditions of confinement, including access to medical services, overcrowding, physical and verbal abuse, and access to soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and menstrual hygiene products.
- Ban the use of prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement in immigration detention—especially for people with psychosocial disabilities (mental health conditions), any history of receiving mental health treatment or any identified risk of dying by suicide, and anyone with a serious medical condition.

Guarantee Legal Access and Oversight

- Guarantee detainees' ability to engage with their legal counsel by providing private meeting spaces, prompt access to free, confidential legal calls and video calls, including outgoing legal calls, and timely information about legal rights and proceedings during the detainees' processing period.
- Conduct unannounced inspections to ensure accurate assessment of conditions of confinement.
- As required by previous Congresses, make ERO inspections, OIDO inspections, and Detainee Death Reports (including those conducted by OIDO, DHS Office of the Inspector General, and CRCL) available to the public within 60 days of the inspection or, in the case of death reports, within 30 days of the death.
- Provide regular public and congressional reporting on the frequency and circumstances of unanticipated events resulting in death or serious physical or psychological injury to a patient or patients in detention (also known as sentinel events).

To State and Local Officials and Legislators in Texas

- Terminate all 287(g) agreements between state and local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement.
- Repeal Texas Senate Bill 8 (SB 8), signed into law in 2025, requiring all Texas sheriffs to enter into a written agreement with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to participate in the 287(g) program, which is a program allowing ICE to deputize local law enforcement officers to perform immigration duties.
 - Conduct oversight hearings in public safety committees to investigate the role of state and local law enforcement in federal immigration enforcement.
- Establish independent fora to allow Texans to describe their experiences with immigration policies and detention in El Paso and to express their policy preferences to their state and local elected officials, and ultimately to their federal elected officials.

To Private Contractors Operating Detention Facilities

- Comply with national detentions standards (PBNDS and NDS).

- Align all facility operations with international standards, including the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), to uphold detainees' rights and dignity.
- Enact policies and procedures that align with international human rights law, relevant domestic laws and jurisprudence on the rights of detainees, anti-discrimination practices, medical and mental health care procedures and standards, appropriate use of segregation, and appropriate use of force, to prevent abuses and misconduct, and train staff on those policies and procedures.

To the UN Committee Against Torture, the UN Human Rights Committee, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees

- Investigate the allegations of ill-treatment in US immigration detention in this and other reports.
- Consider fact-finding visits and regular monitoring of Camp East Montana and other ICE detention facilities.
- Call on the US government to comply with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules) and specialized standards, such as UNHCR ExCom Conclusion 44 on the Detention of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers and UNHCR's Detention Guidelines.

Methodology

This report is the product of a joint initiative—the Aryeh Neier Fellowship—between Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to strengthen respect and protections for human rights in the United States.

This report is based on research conducted by Human Rights Watch in El Paso, Texas, between October 2025 and June 2026.

Human Rights Watch conducted 80 interviews for this report, including 71 interviews with people detained at Camp East Montana, four with detained people’s family members, and five with lawyers and El Paso community advocates. Most of our interviews with people detained at Camp East Montana were conducted in person, four were held by phone, and thirty by video call. All interviews were conducted individually and in private to the extent possible. Our interviews were primarily conducted in Spanish, with five in English and one in Portuguese.

We interviewed people from Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

All interviewees gave their full informed consent to the interviews and were not paid or otherwise offered financial incentives to participate. This report uses pseudonyms for all detained people. Exact interview dates are also withheld to better safeguard confidentiality.

Human Rights Watch reviewed documents, court records and rulings, reports, policies, and files from multiple sources, including official documentation from the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the US Department of Defense (DOD). All documents are publicly available or on file with Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch sought comment from DHS, DOD, and the companies contracted to run Camp East Montana but had not received replies by July 15, the date this report was finalized for publication.

Background

The United States operates the largest immigration detention system in the world.⁴ Mass immigration detention as an enforcement tactic is a relatively recent development in the US, however.⁵ Federal lawmakers laid the blueprint for today's widespread use of immigration enforcement and detention in the 1990s following the enactment of criminal and immigration laws that significantly increased the criminalization and mass incarceration of immigrants, particularly those from communities of color.⁶

Over the last decade, the US immigration detention system has entered a new phase of unprecedented growth.⁷ In fiscal year 2025, the US detained more than 310,000 people in more than 200 detention centers, jails, and prisons across the country. As of February 2026, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) maintains an average daily population of 67,456 people in its detention network, which includes facilities overwhelmingly run by private contractors.⁸

In recent years, most people arrested and sent to immigration detention have been either people apprehended at the US border or noncitizens arrested in the country's interior following encounters with federal or local law enforcement.⁹ Many are held for months or even years while their immigration claims are adjudicated.¹⁰

⁴ "United States Detention Statistics," Global Detention Project, 2024, <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/americas/united-states#statistics-data> (accessed March 31, 2026).

⁵ Doris Meissner et al., "Immigration Enforcement in the United States: The Rise of a Formidable Machinery," Migration Policy Institute, January 2013, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigration-enforcement-united-states-rise-formidable-machinery> (accessed March 31, 2026).

⁶ Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-132, § 440(a), 110 Stat. 1214 (1996); Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-208, § 133, 110 Stat. 3009 (1996).

⁷ American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Human Rights Watch, National Immigrant Justice Center, "Justice Free Zones: U.S. Immigration Detention Under the Trump Administration," April 30, 2020, <https://www.aclu.org/publications/justice-free-zones-us-immigration-detention-under-trump-administration> (accessed March 31, 2026).

⁸ Human Rights Watch analysis of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) data, downloaded from "Detention Management," webpage, <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management> (accessed March 31, 2026).

⁹ American Immigration Council, "Immigration Detention Expansion in Trump's Second Term," January 2026, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/immigration-detention-report.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹⁰ Ibid., p.6.

Despite the legal distinction between civil immigration detention and criminal incarceration, US immigration detention facilities are indistinguishable in most respects to prisons. Indeed, the federal government frequently contracts with prisons and jails to hold detained immigrants on its behalf, with significant reliance on facilities owned or operated by private prison corporations. As of early 2025, approximately 90 percent of people ICE detained were held in facilities either owned or operated by private contractors.¹¹

The ICE detention system has operated with a consistent lack of transparency across administrations. Incidents of violence, failures in medical treatment, and abusive conditions of confinement are similarly underreported. Since the second Trump administration took office in January 2025, at least 52 people have died in ICE custody, making 2025 the deadliest year on record for immigration detention, with 2026 currently on track to surpass that total.¹² As the death toll rises, ICE has failed to report information about deaths in accordance with federal standards, raising serious concerns about government transparency and accountability.¹³

Over the past decade, Human Rights Watch and the ACLU have reported failures by the US government to provide adequate medical care at immigration detention centers, resulting in severe suffering.¹⁴ Human Rights Watch and the ACLU have also found that violations of medical care standards have sometimes played a prominent role in deaths of people in ICE

¹¹ “Immigration Detention Statistics: A Retrospective and a Look Forward,” Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, February 21, 2025, <https://tracreports.org/reports/753/> (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹² Ximena Bustillo and Rahul Mukherjee, “Immigration Detention on Track for Deadliest Fiscal Year Since 2004,” NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/10/g-s1-111238/immigration-detention-deaths-custody> (accessed May 6, 2026).

¹³ Lomi Kriel and Colleen Deguzman, “Six Deaths in Six Weeks: What to Know About ICE Detentions in Texas,” Texas Tribune, February 19, 2026, <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/02/19/ice-detention-deaths-texas-east-montana-dilley-campos/> (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, ACLU, National Immigrant Justice Center, and Detention Watch Network, *Code Red: The Fatal Consequences of Dangerously Substandard Medical Care in Immigration Detention* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/06/20/code-red/fatal-consequences-dangerously-substandard-medical-care-immigration>; Human Rights Watch and Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC), *Systemic Indifference: Dangerous and Substandard Medical Care in US Immigration Detention* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/05/08/systemic-indifference/dangerous-substandard-medical-care-us-immigration-detention>; Human Rights Watch, *Detained and Dismissed: Women’s Struggles to Obtain Health Care in United States Immigration Detention* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2009), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/03/17/detained-and-dismissed/womens-struggles-obtain-health-care-united-states>.

custody.¹⁵ These problems were on stark display during the first Trump Administration.¹⁶ We have also documented physical, psychological, and sexual abuse at immigration detention facilities.¹⁷

The scale of these problems has been amplified by recent increases in funding for immigration detention and significant rollbacks in protections for detained people. Following President Trump's 2025 inauguration, the US government dramatically expanded its detention of immigrants, the numbers quickly reaching levels unprecedented in US history. The mass expansion of immigration detention was enabled by the US Congress through a multi-year funding bill, the reconciliation bill passed in July 2025 referred to by the administration of President Trump as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.¹⁸ The new law allocated approximately \$75 billion to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) over four years, including \$45 billion for immigration detention, tripling ICE's annual budget and making ICE the largest federal law enforcement agency.¹⁹

Rather than imposing greater oversight as ICE's powers expanded, Congress continued to increase the agency's resources with few meaningful safeguards. In June 2026, despite well-documented reports of abuses carried out by ICE in 2025, the House of Representatives passed a reconciliation bill that provided an additional \$70 billion in

¹⁵ ACLU, Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), and American Oversight, *Deadly Failures: Preventable Deaths in U.S. Immigration Detention* (New York: ACLU, 2024), <https://www.aclu.org/publications/deadly-failures-preventable-deaths-in-us-immigrant-detention> (accessed March 31, 2026); ACLU, DWN, NIJC, "Fatal Neglect: How ICE Ignores Deaths in Detention," February 24, 2016, <https://www.aclu.org/publications/fatal-neglect-how-ice-ignores-death-detention> (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹⁶ ACLU, Human Rights Watch, and National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC), *Justice Free Zones: US Immigration Detention Under the Trump Administration* (New York: ACLU, 2020), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/justice_free_zones_immigrant_detention.pdf (accessed April 16, 2026); Human Rights Watch and CIVIC, *Systemic Indifference: Dangerous and Substandard Medical Care in US Immigration Detention*.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, Americans for Immigrant Justice, and Sanctuary of the South, "You Feel Like Your Life Is Over": Abusive Practices at Three Florida Immigration Detention Centers Since January 2025 (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/07/21/you-feel-like-your-life-is-over/abusive-practices-at-three-florida-immigration>; ACLU, "Sexual Abuse in Immigration Detention," April 12, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/sexual-abuse-in-immigration-detention> (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹⁸ Act to Provide for Reconciliation Pursuant to Title II of H. Con. Res. 14, Pub. L. No. 119, 139 Stat. 72 (July 4, 2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1> (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹⁹ "Big Budget Act Creates a 'Deportation-Industrial Complex,'" Brennan Center for Justice, August 13, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/big-budget-act-creates-deportation-industrial-complex> (accessed March 31, 2026).

funds for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol without any reforms to limit violent and abusive tactics by federal agents.²⁰

These unprecedented investments in immigration enforcement were accompanied by sweeping policy changes that dramatically expanded the government's arrest authority. The second Trump administration dramatically expanded apprehensions, and subsequent detentions, of people who were not traditionally targets of immigration enforcement through three major shifts in policy: the widespread use of “collateral arrests”²¹ and “roving patrols,”²² the expansion of worksite raids to a level not seen in the modern era, and the creation of new “re-arrest” policies which have seen ICE officers detaining people who appear for court hearings and ICE check-ins.²³

Judicial developments further reinforced this expansion of enforcement authority. In 2025, the US Supreme Court lifted a lower court’s temporary order blocking immigration arrests based solely on certain factors, including apparent race, ethnicity, or language, while the underlying lawsuit unfolds before the lower court.²⁴ This ruling—while not creating binding law on the issue—has, in effect, meant that immigration agents may feel that there are no clear judicial constraints on their ability to stop and arrest people on the basis of their race or ethnicity. In practice, these stops and arrests have often been carried out arbitrarily and in apparent violation of the international human rights law prohibition on racial discrimination.²⁵

²⁰ ACLU, ACLU Statement on House Vote to Add \$70 Billion to ICE and Border Patrol’s Bloated Budget, June 9, 2026, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-statement-on-house-vote-to-add-70-billion-to-ice-and-border-patrols-bloated-budget> (accessed June 29, 2026).

²¹ Collateral arrests are arrests in which agents looked for a person they identified in advance as being in violation of immigration law but encountered others at the same location who they believed were also in violation of immigration law.

²² Roving patrols refer to mobile enforcement operations where agents, often in unmarked vehicles, patrol areas, including far from borders, to detain people based on “reasonable suspicion” of immigration violations.

²³ American Immigration Council, “Immigration Detention Expansion in Trump’s Second Term,” January 2026, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/immigration-detention-report.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2026).

²⁴ *Noem v. Vasquez-Perdomo*, 606 U. S. ____ (2025).

²⁵ Human Rights Watch, “A Manufactured Crisis’ Minnesota Communities Terrorized by the Federal Government” June 19, 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2026/06/18/a-manufactured-crisis/minnesota-communities-terrorized-by-the-federal-government> (accessed June 29, 2026).

Together, these legislative, executive, and judicial developments have fundamentally transformed the immigration enforcement landscape.

Growing ICE operations have also drawn in other government agencies, including the Bureau of Prisons and the Department of War, using military bases as deportation hubs²⁶ and growing ICE partnerships with local sheriffs and county jails.²⁷ These expanding detention networks have enabled rapid, large-scale increases in confinement across immigration detention facilities.

At Camp East Montana, the scale-up was especially abrupt. A small number of detainees began arriving in early August 2025. By August 14, the facility held 46 people. Just three days later, that number had surged to 982. By the end of September 2025, nearly 3,000 people were confined there.

The population peaked at 3,880 in January 2026, during the height of immigration apprehensions in Minnesota as part of Operation Metro Surge. Many people detained in Minnesota, as well as those swept up in other large-scale enforcement operations across the country, were transferred to Camp East Montana.

²⁶ “This Week in DOD: 200 Days of Impact, Fort Bliss Assumes New Role in Homeland Defense, SkillBridge Lets Service Members Keep Defending Nation,” US Department of War, August 8, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4268806/this-week-in-dod-200-days-of-impact-fort-bliss-assumes-new-role-in-homeland-def/> (accessed March 31, 2026).

²⁷ American Civil Liberties Union, “Deputized for Disaster,” February 26, 2026, <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/ice-expanding-287g-agreements-police> (accessed March 31, 2026).

Daily Population at Camp East Montana

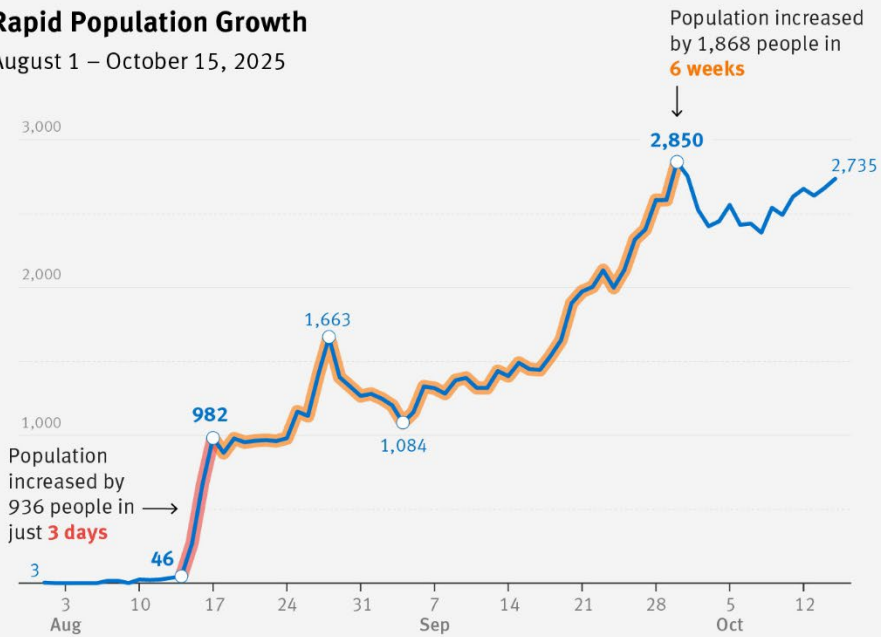
August 1, 2025 – March 9, 2026



zoomed-in view

Rapid Population Growth

August 1 – October 15, 2025



Source: Human Rights Watch analysis of ICE ERO data provided in response to a FOIA request to the Deportation Data Project.

Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch

The Arrest, Detention, and Transfer Pipeline

Abusive Arrests

Nicolas W., 43 and father of four from Guatemala, was living in Boston, Massachusetts, prior to being detained. He told us he had a valid work permit and had lived in the United States for 10 years.²⁸ Nicolas told Human Rights Watch:

I was arrested by ICE on September 26, around 9:00 a.m. I own a tow truck company and that morning I went to Home Depot to buy tools. When I came out of the store and was walking toward my truck, I noticed I was being followed. I looked over my shoulder and saw a masked man standing over me. He grabbed me by the arm, he pulled hard and refused to let me go. I asked him what he was doing, and he told me to shut up. He dragged me by the arm to the parking lot with more agents and began searching me. When I asked why they were searching me, they told me that I did not have the right to speak. I was arrested and taken to a station in Burlington [a Boston suburb].²⁹

As in Nicolas's case, many of the ICE agents and other law enforcement officers who carried out apprehensions during these operations did not identify themselves, wore masks and did not have visible name tags or badge numbers.³⁰ It is also apparent that in many cases, ICE arbitrarily targeted people of color and Spanish-speakers for arrest.

Alonso C, 72, from Cuba, told us he had a valid work permit and lived in the United States for over 46 years. He was playing dominos outside of a bodega in Miami, Florida, when he was approached by masked agents who did not wear visible name tags.³¹ He told Human Rights Watch the agents were looking for a man who went by "El Flaco." Alonso told the agents he did not know who that was. Nevertheless, they asked to see his papers and proceeded to handcuff and arrest him even after he produced his work permit. Alonso

²⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Nicolas W., El Paso, November 2025.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Further references to "agents" by interviewees and researchers where agents did not identify themselves indicates an assumption that the person apprehending is actually a federal agent, despite the lack of identification.

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Alonso C., El Paso, December 2025.

said, “They didn’t have a warrant, they didn’t even show their faces. They didn’t care that I had my permit.” Alonso was taken to Krome North Service Processing Center, an immigration detention facility in Miami-Dade County. He was eventually transferred to Camp East Montana.³²

Masked agents also apprehended immigrants near their homes. Ramiro G., 33, from Ecuador, lived in Buffalo, New York, told Human Rights Watch he was walking to work when he noticed he was being followed by an unmarked van:

I was leaving my apartment complex and a van was trailing behind me. It didn’t have any markings, but I knew something had to be wrong, especially with all the ICE raids going on. I panicked and immediately sent a text message to my wife, “Don’t come outside, I think ICE is here.” When I walked out of the complex and into the main road, the van turned on its lights. The officers rolled down the window; they were wearing masks. They asked if I was [name withheld]. I told them no, and they asked for my identification. I didn’t have anything to show because I’m undocumented, so they arrested me.³³

Ramiro said that he was handcuffed and taken to Buffalo (Batavia) Service Processing Center, an immigration holding facility, before being transferred to Camp East Montana.

ICE agents frequently used excessive force during enforcement operations.³⁴ In one instance, Santiago M., 44, from Colombia, had an employment authorization document, was living in Baltimore, Maryland, and on his way home from his job at Walmart when he was arrested by federal agents. He recalled:

On Sunday, September 15, [2025,] as I was leaving the Walmart parking lot, a van pulled me over. The officers instantly asked whether I had papers. I

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Alonso C., El Paso, December 2025.

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ramiro G., El Paso, December 2025.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with Nicolas W., El Paso, November 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Santiago M., El Paso, November 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Rafael H., November 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Victor S., El Paso, November 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Eduardo S., El Paso, December 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Pablo O., El Paso, November 2025.

told them I had my Real ID³⁵ and that I was in the United States legally. I showed them my ID, and they did not care. They ordered me out of the vehicle, and when I moved to open the door, they grabbed me and threw me to the ground where they handcuffed me. I told them I was not a criminal and repeatedly asked why I was being detained. One of the officers told me it was because I did not have a green card.³⁶

In at least 3 other cases, people detained at Camp East Montana told us that immigration agents yanked them out of their vehicles, beat them and, in one case, tasered them.³⁷

These accounts suggest that such force was not limited to situations involving resistance or threats. Several people described immigration agents resorting to extreme measures even after they had complied with orders to stop their vehicles, answered or prepared to answer questions, provided requested documentation, and posed no apparent threat.

The use of these tactics has not been confined to federal immigration agents. In jurisdictions where state and local police have entered into agreements to perform immigration enforcement functions, some of those police forces have also adopted similar practices.³⁸

For instance, Armando G. was driving his motorcycle to work in Odessa, Texas when the police pulled him over. He said the officer immediately asked if he spoke English. When he told the officer he did not speak English, the officer looked angry and forcefully pulled Armando's left arm to haul him from his motorcycle. Samuel said he fell to the ground and once he managed to stand, the officer forced his arms behind his back, handcuffed him, and took him to Odessa County Jail. Armando later learned that he was pulled over for an outstanding fine.³⁹

³⁵ A Real ID is an identification document issued by a state or federal agency after verification of immigration status. See "Get a REAL ID," USA Gov, <https://www.usa.gov/real-id> (accessed March 31, 2026).

³⁶ American Civil Liberties Union, "Deputized for Disaster," February 26, 2026, <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/ice-expanding-287g-agreements-police> (accessed March 31, 2026).

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Santiago M., El Paso, November 2025.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Dante S., El Paso, December 2025, Human Rights Watch interview with Santiago M., El Paso, November 2025, Human Rights Watch interview with Armando G., El Paso, November 2025.

³⁹ American Civil Liberties Union, "Deputized for Disaster."

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Armando G., El Paso, November 2025.

Dante S., who told Human Rights Watch that he lived in the United States for 13 years and worked in construction before he was detained in Jacksonville, Florida, said he was pulled over by Jacksonville police as he was leaving a construction site. When the person in the passenger seat tried to run away, three officers broke the window on the driver's side of the truck and pulled Dante out of the vehicle by force even though he had been complying with their orders, he said. Dante told us he saw an officer draw his taser. "I told him I have heart issues, please don't use that on me." The officer discharged the taser and he fell to the ground. "I was already on the ground when an officer forced his knee on my head. That is the last thing I remember. I woke up in the hospital in complete shock. I had never been attacked this way in my life." Dante told Human Rights Watch that the police report he received stated that he was arrested for not having a current car registration.⁴⁰

According to the ACLU, Dante's case is far from unusual: the organization found that under the 287(g) agreements, local police are increasingly mimicking the abusive tactics federal agents have employed in mass deportation efforts. These agreements turn routine traffic stops into life-changing immigration enforcement encounters.⁴¹

Camp East Montana reflects the growing role of these partnerships in driving immigration detention. More than 1,400 people at Camp East Montana were arrested through 287(g) agreements with local jurisdictions. Most of those people were arrested in Florida, in which 344 jurisdictions have signed 287(g) agreements, the highest number of any state.

Valeria C., 44, from Cuba, lived in Tampa, Florida for five years and told us she had a valid work permit. She told us she was pulled over by a police officer for speeding on her way to work. The officer asked for her papers and when she showed her work permit, he told her he had to contact ICE. She was detained shortly afterward.⁴² Valeria's case illustrates how routine encounters with local police have become a part of broader federal enforcement campaigns.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Dante S., El Paso, December 2025.

⁴¹ American Civil Liberties Union, "Deputized for Disaster."

⁴² Human Rights Watch Interview with Valeria C., El Paso, November 2025.

Many immigration enforcement operations initially targeted communities where Latino people work and live.⁴³ Over the course of the year, these operations expanded to other areas with sizable immigrant communities.⁴⁴ In Minnesota during “Operation Metro Surge”, for example, federal agents appear to have engaged in widespread racial profiling by stopping, arresting, or detaining people on the basis of their perceived race or ethnicity, including by using these factors as a crude proxy for a person’s apparent nationality.⁴⁵ Citizens of color interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they were so fearful of racial profiling that they began carrying their passports everywhere.⁴⁶ Many US citizens were among those unlawfully swept up, including through racial profiling or while observing or protesting ICE or Customs and Border Protection activity.⁴⁷

Mass enforcement operations also reached people who were attempting to comply with immigration requirements. Immigration and Customs Enforcement also apprehended people at courthouses and during scheduled ICE check-ins, settings where people are attempting to comply with legal obligations.⁴⁸ Cesar R.’s case illustrates this practice. We interviewed Cesar R., a 30-year-old asylum seeker from Nicaragua who lived in Dallas, Texas. Cesar had yearly check-ins. During his last check-in on September 19, 2025, he was detained and offered \$1,000 to accept a voluntary departure. Cesar declined and was subsequently transferred to Camp East Montana. He told us his asylum claim was pending at the time of his apprehension and he did not have an order of removal.⁴⁹

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, “ICE Abuses in Los Angeles Set Stage for Other Cities: Federal Campaign Targets Latinos, Blatantly Violates Rights,” November 5, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/11/04/us-ice-abuses-in-los-angeles-set-stage-for-other-cities>.

⁴⁴ Heather Schlitz, “‘Not a Life Here.’ Immigration Raids Hollow Out Chicago Neighborhood”, Reuters, December 17, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/usa-trump-immigration-chicago/> (accessed April 8, 2026).

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, “‘A Manufactured Crisis’ Minnesota Communities Terrorized by the Federal Government” June 19, 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2026/06/18/a-manufactured-crisis/minnesota-communities-terrorized-by-the-federal-government> (accessed June 29, 2026).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Cesar R., El Paso, December 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Iván C., El Paso, December 2025, Human Rights Watch Interview with Orlando L., El Paso, December 2025.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Cesar R., El Paso, December 2025

Sudden Transfers and Incommunicado Detention

Rafael H. told us he had a valid work permit and a pending application for permanent residence based on his marriage to a U.S. citizen. He was initially arrested in Boston and said he was subsequently transferred among multiple jails and immigration detention centers without being told where he was being taken or why he was being detained.

During this time, Rafael told Human Rights Watch, he was not allowed to make phone calls or otherwise communicate with his wife. As a result, she had no information about his whereabouts for a week:

They shipped me from state to state . . . without even telling me where I was going or why my legal authorization was suddenly invalid. I should have been judged by a court in Massachusetts. That is where I live, that is where I am married to a United States citizen.

Instead, I was flown to El Paso in an unmarked plane. Handcuffed and chained from head to toe.... I even had chains around my waist as if I were a wanted criminal when I have no criminal record and was never even told why I was arrested. It was ridiculous. My wife had no idea where I was, and I had no way of reaching out to her. They kidnapped me.⁵⁰

As in Rafael's case, most of the people Human Rights Watch interviewed said they were rapidly moved through several detention centers without explanation, notice to attorneys, or the opportunity to inform family members of their whereabouts.

Family members described being unable to find any information about their loved ones' whereabouts on the ICE detainee locator website, a page dedicated to locating people in ICE and CBP custody; instead, the ICE website displayed a "CALL ICE FOR DETAILS" message and provided an El Paso phone number. When family members dialed the number, they told us they either did not receive a response or were told that the person was not in ICE custody at the location they had reached.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Rafael H., El Paso, November 2025.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Lidia G., November 2025; Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Noris P., November 2025; Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Albina C., December 2025.

The effect of these abrupt—and in some cases repeated—transfers was increased panic, confusion, and isolation.

In dozens of interviews, Human Rights Watch heard from people who described being cut off from the outside world as the U.S. government flew them between detention centers without telling them where they were being taken or why.

People arrested by 287(g)-deputized officers and ICE agents in their communities told us they were initially held in crowded cells at local jails alongside people charged with criminal offenses. At least 30 people said they requested documents and information about the reasons for their arrests and how long they would be detained but received no answers until moments before they were transferred to ICE custody. Several said they were never informed that an ICE detainer⁵² had been lodged against them.

According to most of the people we interviewed, the government transferred people to immigration detention centers before they could make a single phone call. They told us that their family members were unable to find them using the ICE detainee locator system and had no information about their whereabouts.

The transfer routes varied by region but followed a similar pattern of repeated movement through multiple facilities. People arrested in Florida reported being transferred from local jails to immigration detention centers in that state, including Krome and the large detention center in the Everglades known as “Alligator Alcatraz,” before being flown to Camp East Montana. People arrested in New York said they were detained in Buffalo or elsewhere in the state, then transferred to Krome or Alligator Alcatraz, in some cases both, before arriving at Camp East Montana. People arrested in Minnesota, Chicago, and Los Angeles were often flown directly to Camp East Montana, sometimes after a brief time in local detention centers.

⁵² An ICE detainer, also known as an “immigration hold,” is a written request asking a local jail or other law enforcement agency to hold a person for up to 48 hours beyond their scheduled release so ICE can decide whether to take them into federal custody for removal proceedings.

Regardless of where they were arrested, interviewees consistently said they were shuffled between facilities without prior notice, any explanation, or a meaningful opportunity to contact family members or attorneys. These repeated transfers caused significant psychological distress for both detainees and their families. They also disrupted access to legal counsel and hindered detainees' ability to prepare for immigration proceedings, particularly for those with initial, or "master calendar," hearings already scheduled in their states of residence. In many cases, transferring proceedings to El Paso resulted in substantial delays, with some hearings postponed for more than 12 weeks.

"The US government says they are against kidnapping and human trafficking. I wish I could tell them that what they are doing to me feels like kidnapping and trafficking," said Lorenzo P., a 44-year-old man from Ecuador.⁵³

Transfers to Camp East Montana

Sebastian R., 26, from Oaxaca, Mexico, lived and studied in New York for six years before being detained by ICE. He described his September 2025 flight to Camp East Montana:

I felt terrible and was in complete shock. I was chained from head to toe and forced to get on a plane. I cried the entire time because I always dreamed that I would travel on a plane. I had never been on one. I came to this country to study and work. I thought I would save up enough to fly to Disneyland with my brother. That sounds stupid now. I don't know that I will ever be able to fly again. I was handcuffed, hands and feet, with chains around my waist. The cuffs were so tight they left marks on my body. I couldn't move and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I felt like I was being kidnapped. I did not know where I was going, and they refused to answer any questions. That was my first time on a plane. My brother had no idea where I was. I could not call him until a week after I got to El Paso.⁵⁴

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Loranzo P., El Paso, December 2025.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Sebastian R., El Paso, December 2025.

Some people also reported beatings and verbal abuse during flights to Camp East Montana. In one such case, Ariel O., from Honduras, told us ICE agents beat him for asking where he was being taken before boarding the plane to El Paso:

I wanted answers. I wanted to know where they were taking me, so I asked the agents who were forcing us on the plane where I was going. One agent got very angry at me, he called me a “dirty, criminal immigrant” and told me I did not deserve his answers. I responded that I had a right to know where I was being taken. He pushed me to the ground and twisted my right arm really hard. I felt a sharp pain on my shoulder. He threatened to take me to federal prison if I did not get on the plane and pulled me back up. I think he dislocated my shoulder. I asked to see a doctor when I got here but never received help.⁵⁵

On arrival in El Paso, Texas, people were transported by bus to Camp East Montana.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ariel O., El Paso, February 2026.

Daily Life at Camp East Montana

This place is a graveyard of living people. Anything can happen to you here.

—Lorenzo P., interviewed in Camp East Montana, December 2025

Camp East Montana is the largest immigration detention camp in the history of the United States, with the current capacity to hold up to 5,000 people.⁵⁶ Since opening in mid-August 2025, it has operated as a sprawling tent city.

Built inside Fort Bliss, a military base straddling New Mexico and Texas with headquarters in El Paso, Camp East Montana is shielded from public view and access. The camp consists of “soft-sided” structures—a series of large canvas tents on gravel.

People detained at Camp East Montana reported routine beatings and other excessive force by guards, chronic malnutrition, and unsanitary and degrading living conditions.

Rafael H., from Colombia, who had been detained for three months at the time of our interview, summarized his experience at the immigration camp:

I am a veterinarian. I understand how animals should be treated and cared for. I know that animals are treated much better than how they treat us here. If an animal under my care gets sick, it has care and medicine readily available. It has sufficient food to sustain itself, it has the space it needs, it is cared for and looked after. Our situation by contrast is repressive. If we get sick, no one listens or cares. We do not have enough food to sustain healthy bodies. We live in cramped, dirty spaces and we’ve often gone weeks without seeing the sun. We are intentionally disregarded, left to rot.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jason Allen, “New West Texas Immigration Detention Facility Is a ‘Giant Tent City,’ Congresswoman Says,” CBS News, September 11, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-west-texas-immigration-detention-facility-is-a-giant-tent-city-congresswoman-says/> (accessed March 18, 2026).

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Rafael H., El Paso, November 2025.

Inside the Tents

Here we are forgotten and practically kidnapped. It's like a chicken coop. You get fed, you sit, wait, and sleep.

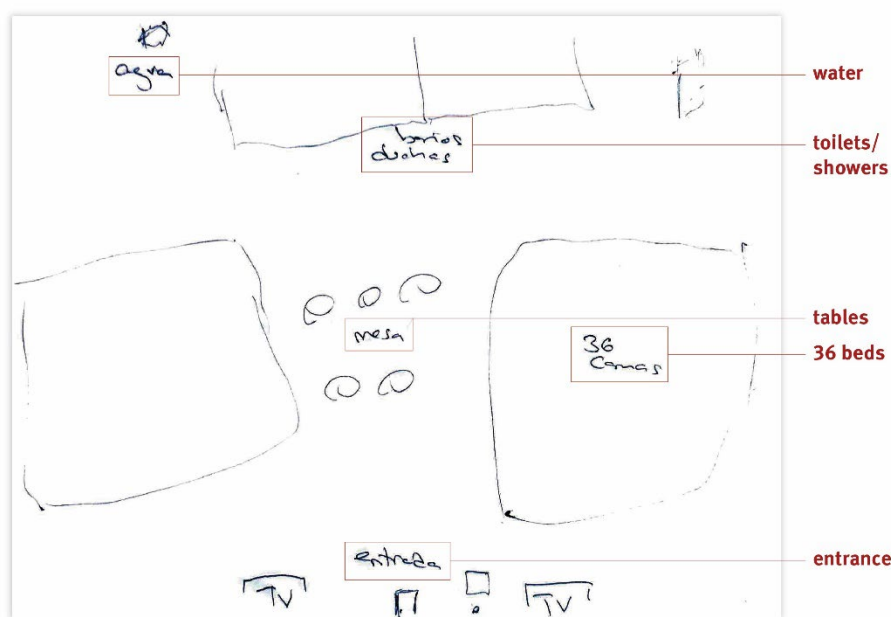
— Vicente H. interviewed in Fort Bliss, November 2025

People held in the Camp East Montana detention facility are segregated by gender and purported risk level. Partitions divide each tent into smaller pods, with a single pod holding up to 72 people. Rows of 36 bunk beds line one side of the pod, while toilets and showers are clustered on the opposite side. People eat in an open area directly in front of the bathrooms, with no barriers separating them from the foul odors and frequent leaks that leave floors covered in water.

Tomás M., 52, from Mexico who was detained at Camp East Montana from August 2025 to January 2026, provided the following drawing:⁵⁸

Camp East Montana Detention Facility Layout

Drawing provided by a former detainee



Drawing provided by Tomás M., 52, from Mexico, who was detained at Camp East Montana from August 2025 to January 2026.

Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch

⁵⁸ Collected during Human Rights Watch Interview with Tomás M., El Paso, November 2025.

The tent's lights remain on from 6 a.m. until 11 p.m. and resemble the lighting inside a warehouse, consisting of overhead fluorescent bulbs, people said.

Adam A., from Chile, who was detained at Camp East Montana from September to December 2025, told Human Rights Watch, “The lights are on from very early in the morning until late night. We have no control over them. They are very harsh and make it difficult to get any rest. Since we are inside all day, the light strains my eyes and gives me horrible headaches.”⁵⁹

With no windows and limited access to outdoor recreation, detained people described losing any sense of time inside the tents. Alonso C., 72, from Cuba, said, “I never know what day or what time it is. I’m always disoriented. There is no clock in the dorm... there is nothing. It is humiliating what they are doing to us.”⁶⁰

Vents blow unfiltered air into the pods, carrying dust and insects from the surrounding desert and nearby construction site. People in detention said the dust settles over everything, coating bedding, clothing, and common areas within hours of cleaning by detainees. Several interviewees described worsening allergies, persistent coughing, irritated eyes, and difficulty breathing.

Esteban H., 46, from Guatemala, who lived in Boston prior to being detained, told us:

From my experience in construction, I know that vents in any place used for living or working must have filters. The vents in my unit have no filters and are poorly built. Dust from outside blows directly into the tent through holes in the vents. Bugs, blue and gray dust collects on the beds, floors, and under the bunks. This dust causes people, including me, to have difficulty breathing, allergies, and lung irritation. The guards know this but do nothing. At most, a group of staff comes once a month to do light sweeping.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Adam A., El Paso, October 2025.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Alonso C., El Paso, December 2025.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Esteban H., El Paso, December 2025.

Detainees told us that dust mixes with sweat from the heat and the resulting body odor and the persistent smell from the bathrooms, creates an environment that is both physically nauseating and mentally exhausting. Overcrowding intensifies the effect, leaving little space to escape the noise, smells, or one another.

With only makeshift partitions separating pods, sound travels easily. Conversations, arguments, metal doors clanging, and cries echo throughout the tents at all hours.

Adam A., from Chile, told us, “Both men and women regularly cry. We can hear everything, all the time.”⁶²

Many described the constant sensory input, including bright lights, circulating dust, foul odors, and unrelenting noise, as overstimulating and disorienting. They said it makes it difficult to sleep, concentrate, or find moments of calm.

People sleep on narrow bunk beds, often with little personal space or privacy. They are provided a thin mattress, two bed sheets, and a single blanket. People in detention said that the blanket, made of a recycled material resembling plastic, caused skin irritation, rashes, and allergic reactions, and shed visible fibers.

Pablo O. told Human Rights Watch, “The blankets here are terrible. Mine has pieces of wire, like the kind on sponges used to scrub dishes, and it has plastic threads that felt like fishing line.”⁶³

Detainees also described the blanket as insufficient to keep warm. Several people said the pods become especially cold at night, particularly during the winter months in the desert.

Forced to Live in Filth

Interviewees said that staff rarely clean the facilities, resulting in unsanitary and degrading living conditions. According to most people we interviewed, a cleaning company swept and mopped every two weeks, leaving toilets and showers covered in bodily waste for

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Adam A., El Paso, October 2025.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Pablo O., El Paso, December 2025.

much of the period in between. Some detainees said no one at the facility cleaned their pods at all.

Each pod contains six toilets and six showers for up to 72 people. With so many people sharing so few facilities, interviewees told us using the bathroom is difficult and uncomfortable. People also described long waits and constant exposure to unsanitary surfaces covered in feces and urine.

Diego A., a man who was detained at Camp East Montana for two months at the time of our interview, said:

Ever since I arrived, the cell has had a water leak. We're living in squalor... It's completely flooded. Every time someone takes a shower, the whole cell floods. . . The guards have made holes in the floor, but the cell is still leaking.

He told us that infections were common, which he attributed to the unsanitary living conditions in the pod.⁶⁴

Ruben M., 24, detained for one month at the time of our interview and remained at Camp East Montana as of the writing of this report, said:

The showers are in terrible condition. Out of six, two have been broken for two months and the remaining four are shared by 60 to 70 people. They smell awful, the drains are always clogged, and water constantly pools on the floor. One person is developing a foot fungus because there are no shower shoes, and his request for them has not been addressed.⁶⁵

In some instances, people reported slipping on the wet floors while walking around the pod. They said they reported this issue to facility guards and to ICE daily.

The shared toilets in the pods regularly malfunctioned. Ruben said:

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Diego A., El Paso, October 2025.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ruben M., El Paso, December 2025.

The toilets are even worse [than showers]. In our pod, we designated two for urine and the other four are shared among everyone else. The smell of urine and feces is constant and disgusting. Cleaning is very rare. We are lucky if the room is cleaned once a week and when they do clean, they don't touch the bathrooms. A man in my pod sometimes tries to scrub the toilets with a [used] toothbrush, no gloves.⁶⁶

Facility staff failed to maintain a regular cleaning schedule. As a result, people resorted to asking for cleaning supplies to prevent the spread of bacteria and keep clean. Iván C. said, "Hygiene here is terrible and we have to do the cleaning. We often face issues in getting cleaning supplies. Even for that you have to fight."⁶⁷

At best, people said the guards allowed them to borrow a broom and a mop to keep their pods clean. The guards did not provide detergent or other cleaning supplies. When detained people raised concerns about having to clean the facilities themselves with limited supplies they were told by guards, "If you want to smell like shit, smell like shit—it is not our responsibility to clean your cells."⁶⁸

Refusal to Provide Basic Personal Hygiene Supplies

The facility often does not provide soap and hand sanitizer, leaving people unable to wash their hands properly after using the toilet, before eating, or throughout the day. Most people we interviewed said facility staff gave them a single small packet of 2 in 1 shampoo per day, which many used as sparingly as possible to be able to clean their hands and wash their clothes. In some cases, facility staff failed to distribute packets of shampoo for over a week, forcing detained people to clean their bodies using only water.⁶⁹

People also said guards sporadically provided them with single-use toothbrushes. They told us they were each supposed to receive a new toothbrush daily but often went weeks without receiving a replacement because, according to staff, the facility "ran out."

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Ruben M., El Paso, December 2025.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Iván C., El Paso, December 2025.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Orlando L., El Paso, December 2025.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Christian P., El Paso, December 2025.

Cesar R., 30, from Nicaragua, told us, “We once went 3 weeks without receiving a toothbrush, we had some toothpaste, but it was scarce, and we had to ration it among 70 people. We asked for toothbrushes daily during this time... The toothbrushes they give us are disposable, they cause bleeding gums and swelling. They are not good for more than one use, so going three weeks with one of those is impossible.”⁷⁰

Another detainee reported developing a gum infection, which she attributed to not being able to replace her toothbrush.⁷¹

The US government’s failure to provide soap or hand sanitizer is particularly problematic. In a crowded detention environment, where people share toilets, showers, and living spaces, not having the means to wash one’s hands or soap to clean one’s body properly increases the risk of contagious infection and illness.⁷²

In one such case, Elmer M., 28, from Guatemala, told Human Rights Watch that he developed a rash on his penis that eventually became infected because he was not provided soap or any supplies to wash or treat the rash. This condition started in December, and for weeks he asked guards and signed up to see a medic on a daily basis. As of March, Elmer had waited four months to see a medic.⁷³

Emiliano S., 37, from Nicaragua, told us that he contracted a nail infection while detained. During his time at Camp East Montana, he told us the infection worsened. “My nails have chipped off entirely. This is causing me great discomfort and embarrassment. I require ointment and medication for this infection. However, I have not received this ointment or medication at all.” He said he had repeatedly requested medical care without a response. “The process of requesting medical care is humiliating,” he told us.⁷⁴

Trapped Indoors Without Recreational or Educational Activities

ICE’s National Detention Standards (NDS) suggest that detained people “will be allowed to have indoor or outdoor recreation at least one hour each day,” and that outdoor recreation

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Cesar R., El Paso, December 2025.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Valeria C., El Paso, October 2025.

⁷² Physicians for Human Rights, “Praying for Hand Soap and Masks”, January 12, 2021, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/praying-for-hand-soap-and-masks/> (accessed June 29, 2026).

⁷³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Elmer M., March 2026.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Emiliano S., El Paso, October 2025.

should be available for at least one hour a day, five days per week, weather permitting.⁷⁵ In reality, people in detention are often confined indoors for weeks at a time, with no access to sunlight or fresh air. Interviewees told us that between August and December 2025 recreation typically occurred only once every two weeks for approximately 15 minutes. In extreme cases, people interviewed went an entire month without stepping outside.

Lorenzo P. described spending a full month in his pod with roughly 70 other people with no sunlight or fresh air, feeling trapped and isolated:

Between August and September, I went a month without seeing the sun. The guards were just not taking us outside. The people in my unit were all becoming anxious and desperate with nothing to do. I felt trapped, it was torture. When we reached our breaking point, we gathered at the entrance of our cell and hit the metal doors and yelled, “Yarda, yarda, yarda!” We needed to be let out to the yard. We had to do this a couple times before we were taken outside. We still have to do this to be taken outside weekly.⁷⁶

In October, Mateo H., 28, from Nicaragua, who was detained at Camp East Montana for four months, told us:

Most of our time is spent locked inside the cell. There are no education programs, no religious gatherings. All we have is a TV that people fight over. There is a recreational schedule pasted on the walls of the cell, but the guards do not follow it. They say it is because there is no one who can take us outside, that they are missing personnel. We recently went three weeks without going outside. We were finally taken outside for about an hour last Saturday. It’s been a week and we have not been taken outside to see the sun since.⁷⁷

In December 2025, Rafael H., who had been detained at Camp East Montana since September 2025, told us guards routinely failed to abide by the camp’s recreation

⁷⁵ NDS 2025 § 5.2.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Lorenzo P., El Paso, December 2025.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Mateo H., El Paso, October 2025.

schedule. He said, “We often go up to 15 days without seeing the sun. We have a schedule, but the guards never follow it. According to the manual that we have, we are supposed to go outside every day, for up to two hours. It has been 10 days since I last saw the sun.”⁷⁸

By June 2026, detainees reported being taken outside once per week for an hour. Even so, outdoor and recreational opportunities remain inadequate.

Detainees described the recreation areas as small, enclosed spaces with artificial turf, surrounded by barbed wire. With so little room for the 50 to 72 people let out at once, they told us they could do little more than walk in circles. Some of the yards have a single foam ball and a small soccer goal, the only recreational equipment available.

When they were taken outside, facility guards often took people out for recreation early in the morning or late in the evening when the sun was no longer visible and temperatures had dropped. During winter months, we were told guards provided detained people with light sweaters that were inadequate for the desert cold.

Hunger, Malnutrition and Health Risks

People described the food as low quality, insufficient, and unhealthy. They told us the portions they received were so small that they were comparable to meals for toddlers. The food is precooked, frozen, and microwaved before being placed on heated carts and distributed to detained people.

Diego A., 34, from Colombia, was detained at Camp East Montana for two-and-a-half months, told Human Rights Watch: “The food they give us here is usually expired or still frozen, the meals we get are like TV meals. I have bitten into meals that were not fully cooked many times. The portions are also very small, they are not suitable for adults.”⁷⁹

Esteban H., who had been detained at Camp East Montana since September 2025, told us in November:

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Rafael H., El Paso, December 2025.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Diego A., El Paso, October 2025.

The portions are too small . . . Many meals are cold, undercooked, spoiled, or too hard to chew. The eggs we get for breakfast have the texture of plastic. The ‘turkey’ meals we get for lunch and dinner are really just a small amount of oatmeal with a few pieces of turkey sprinkled on top. I worry the food is expired because most items do not have expiration dates. The only edible meal is a small box of Frosted Flakes with milk. I often go hungry and have experienced dizziness and seen white dots because of lack of food.⁸⁰

Detainees reported losing drastic amounts of weight, in some cases they estimated that they lost up to 30 pounds (13.5 kilograms), due to insufficient portions and inadequate nutrition.⁸¹ Others who received regular meals said the high sodium content worsened existing health conditions.

According to detained people, there are at least four types of meals: regular, bland, halal, and kosher. People told us they received meals three times per day with no snacks. Commissary is not available. Breakfast is at 7 a.m., lunch at 12 p.m., and dinner at 5 p.m. Meals are mostly pasta, oatmeal, or barley, with tiny bits of turkey, chicken, or meatballs, and a small handful of frozen vegetables such as peas, carrots, or green beans. Fruit is limited to a single banana, orange, or apple.

Human Rights Watch learned that the facility frequently failed to meet people’s dietary needs. People with diabetes and pre-diabetes who required a bland diet reported long delays or missed meals, placing them at risk of dangerous blood sugar fluctuations. Moreover, the early dinner at 5 p.m., followed by no food until breakfast the next day, was especially difficult for people with health conditions who needed regular meals to stabilize their blood sugar.

Ricardo H., a man with pre-diabetes who was prescribed a bland diet, told us that guards have failed to distribute his meals on more than seven occasions. The day before we interviewed him, Ricardo did not receive lunch. He said that when he asked where his meal was the guards told him they ran out of bland diets and would call for more. His meal never

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Esteban H., El Paso, November 2025.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tomás M., El Paso, October 2025; Human Rights Watch interview with Felipe N., El Paso, October 2025.

arrived. Ricardo told us he asked for food again at 5:00 p.m. and was told “we already told you we don’t have any food for you” by a guard. He was eventually served a moldy baguette for dinner, which he saw as a punishment for speaking up.⁸²

Luciano R., a 52, from Cuba, had hemorrhoids and required a bland diet, repeatedly told guards, both verbally and in writing, that he needed appropriate meals to avoid worsening his condition. His requests were ignored. In desperation, he and other detainees engaged in hunger strikes to draw attention to the conditions. Luciano told us he saw his peers being beaten until they agreed to eat or were sent to solitary confinement.⁸³

The combination of inadequate nutrition, ignored medical needs, and punitive responses to protest placed people at serious risk of physical and medical complications, including gastrointestinal issues, blood sugar crises, and worsening chronic conditions, while also taking a heavy psychological toll. People described feeling helpless and humiliated. Some were forced to go hungry while sick. Some said they feared speaking up because asking for basic medical or dietary needs could lead to punishment.

International standards call for detainees to be provided with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served.⁸⁴ Food and water should not be restricted as a disciplinary sanction and should be provided without exception.⁸⁵

Cesar R. told us, “Food is sacred in my culture. It hurts to think that here they use food as another way to cause us pain.”⁸⁶

Soiled and Missing Clothing

The facility failed to adhere to a regular and reliable laundry schedule. People told us staff regularly lost their clothing or returned it in soiled condition. Rafael H. described being left

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Ricardo H., El Paso, December 2025.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Luciano R., El Paso, October 2025.

⁸⁴ UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rule 22, https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf (accessed April 16, 2026).

⁸⁵ Ibid., Rule 42.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Cesar R., El Paso, December 2025.

without a change of clothes for 15 days after sending his laundry to be cleaned. During this time, he was forced to wear the same underwear, washing it by hand as best he could with his small portion of shampoo.

When clothing was eventually provided, some of it was not his and his was still soiled. Rafael said that when he raised concerns about the condition of the clothing, guards told him, “This is what we have. You either take it or you keep what you have.” He told Human Rights Watch:

We send our clothes off to be cleaned and they never return them. I have gone 15 days, forced to use the same underwear. Can you imagine how humiliating and unsanitary that is? They have also given me someone else’s dirty underwear back when I have sent my clothes off to be cleaned.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Rafael H., El Paso, December 2025.

Beatings, Psychological Abuse, and Other Ill-Treatment

The goal here is to force us to live in fear and to give up. If you want to fight your case, you have to endure injustice and abuse.

— Germán L., interviewed in Fort Bliss, December 2025

Germán L., 32, who had been at Camp East Montana for a month at the time of our interview, told us he repeatedly witnessed beatings:

The guards beat us. When one person speaks up for themselves, they take it out on all of us. It doesn't matter if you haven't done anything wrong. They beat you just for insisting on getting your rights, food, or medicine when you don't get it. They run into our pod in groups of 15, sometimes it looks like 20. They are dressed in all black, wear masks that cover everything but their eyes and don't wear nametags. When they come, they just run in, grab whoever they can and start to beat them. They do not ask questions or try to deescalate situations.

It's clear to me that they're trying to make a point. The point is they are in control and can do whatever they want with us. They can humiliate us, beat us, laugh at us, and nothing will happen to them. They tell us, "You're an immigrant, this is not your country." Sometimes we're beaten and punished just for existing in the wrong place at the wrong time.⁸⁸

The beatings and psychological abuse described by the people we interviewed suggest a practice of punitive violence carried out to humiliate, coerce, and silence detained people who advocate for their rights and daily necessities. Sixty-four of the people interviewed by Human Rights Watch, housed across at least five different tent units, either personally experienced beatings or witnessed the beatings of their peers by "anti-disturbance" guards.

Human Rights Watch learned facility guards beat detained people in response to hunger strikes, requests for medical attention including during emergencies, and protests for

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Germán L., El Paso, December 2025.

outdoor recreation after guards locked detainees indoors for weeks. Guards also beat people after accusing them of violating facility rules. Some people told us guards imposed collective punishment, beating anyone within arm's reach when one or two people were accused of breaking a rule.

Eduardo S., 49, from Honduras, was detained at Camp East Montana since it opened in August. At the time of the interview, he had spent nearly six months in immigration detention. During his time at Camp East Montana, he witnessed frequent beatings and verbal abuse in his pod. These patterns of abuse prevented him from speaking up or asking for daily necessities out of fear that he would be beaten by guards. Eduardo said, "There is no law for us. They can yell at us and humiliate us. We are afraid, one cannot speak up.... This country does not protect anybody, they are killing us."⁸⁹

According to the people we interviewed, some beatings and other physical abuse were apparently carried out with impunity, suggesting that guards operated under the belief that their violent acts were tolerated by superiors.

In one case, Human Rights Watch heard that a supervising lieutenant ordered and witnessed the beating of a detained person.⁹⁰ Germán L. told us:

The other day, the guards dressed in black came into the pod because two men were arguing with a supervising guard about the terrible food. I was sitting at a table by the bathrooms and got curious, so I stood up to see what was happening. A lieutenant saw me get up and yelled at me in English, I don't know what he said and didn't respond, but he was looking at me angrily, so I sat back down. The lieutenant yelled at me again, pointed at me, and sent a guard dressed in all black to come get me.

The guard ran over to me, grabbed me by the collar of my shirt and yanked me out of the chair. I fell on my back and hit my head, he kicked my right side and then forced me back up. He folded my body in half, forced my

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Eduardo S., El Paso, December 2025.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Diego A., El Paso, October 2025.

head down, and dragged me out to the hallway where I was shackled and taken to “the hole.”

Germán said the beating was followed by weeks of punitive isolation:

I have been in the hole for 17 days now. The papers they gave me say I interceded in a fight and attacked an officer. This is not true, so I have not signed it.

I have told them so many times to review the cameras, there are cameras in the rooms. Just look at the cameras. I did not attack anyone. I got up and sat back down after I got yelled at. After my first three days in the hole, I got a paper that said I would be punished for 30 days. I have sent requests and complaints to ICE about this, to try to appeal the punishment. I have no response. I am locked in a small room by myself for a month with no answers and for no reason other than they felt like it and know they can.⁹¹

Beatings During Hunger Strikes and Food-Related Protests

Detained people at Camp East Montana engaged in hunger strike and protests to bring attention to staff failure to distribute meals in a timely manner, provide special diets, and give people sufficient amounts of food. Guards reacted to protests by beating detainees and engaging in other forms of intimidation.

Armando G., 32, from Venezuela, said:

About a week ago, my peers and I went on a hunger strike. We were tired of the same food, and the health issues it was causing, so we stopped eating. We were peaceful. We told an officer that we would not be eating and asked him to please call the captain so that we could discuss our concerns.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Germán L., Dec. 2025 in El Paso, TX

Supervising guards arrived and told us that we would be punished if we did not eat. I calmly explained that the food was not nourishing and was making us sick; we needed a change. A captain gave an order over the radio to have us pulled out of the cell. A group of what looked like 20 guards arrived. They dragged one of my friends out. I was tackled to the ground by seven guards. One of them was choking me, another pulled my hair and slammed my head on the ground.

They were dragging me on the ground like a rag doll. I panicked and tried to hold on to a nearby table. Guards began pulling on my clothes. My pants were ripped off completely; I was almost naked. I asked them to stop and let go of the table. They threw themselves on me again, pulled me up to stand and then slammed me back into the ground where I was handcuffed... They took me to SHU [the solitary housing unit] where I passed out.

The next day, I woke up with bruises on my arms, ribs, and abdomen. Right now, I feel extreme pain. It feels like a hernia in my lower abdomen. I asked to see the doctor, and the guards refused to take me. I haven't even gotten medicine for pain.⁹²

Guards also beat people who raised concerns about delayed meals and the facility's failure to abide by dietary restrictions.

Ricardo H., 31, from Cuba, told Human Rights Watch that he was beaten by guards when he asked for a meal after not being provided food for over 20 hours. According to Ricardo, the beating occurred the week of October 6, 2025, on a day when his first meal of the day was delayed until 1:30 p.m.

Ricardo told us:

⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Armando G., El Paso, December 2025.

I didn't get breakfast that day. Our lunch is usually distributed at noon. By 1:30 p.m. the guards had not handed our meals out. Our meals were ready, the guards placed the food cart in front of us and were refusing to serve it. I protested verbally, I told them I was hungry and that I was human. I needed food. They ignored me so I kicked the metal door out of desperation. About 15 officers from the disturbance control team reacted. A lieutenant grabbed me by the shirt and slammed me to the ground. Six officers restrained me with my face down. I still have severe pain in my ear and in my right collarbone. They also stomped on my neck. At 31 years old, I have never seen death until that day. I thought they were going to kill me.

Ricardo told us he was dragged by three officers down the hallway while he was crying. He said ICE officers observed and laughed at him. He was taken to a small room and recalls being injected in his hand. He became drowsy and subdued after the incident.⁹³

Human Rights Watch learned of at least 11 other instances across four housing units in which the people we interviewed raised concerns about delayed meals by gathering near their pod's door in attempts to get the guard's attention. They told us pod guards called anti-disturbance guards and they arrived in groups of 10-20, depending on the size of the crowd gathered by the door.

Anti-disturbance guards also used pepper spray in at least one instance that we learned about. Diego A., 34, from Colombia, said that in October people in his pod engaged in a hunger strike to bring attention to insufficient food they were receiving. He said anti-disturbance guards were called and pepper-sprayed people when they arrived. Diego told us he saw some of his peers being pushed, kicked, and otherwise beaten for engaging in the protest. He said that no medical attention was provided to those injured by the beatings.⁹⁴

Beatings During Recreation-Related Protests

As described earlier in this report, detained people at Camp East Montana were often trapped indoors, forced to be idle, without recreation or time outdoors for weeks at a time.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ricardo H., El Paso, December 2025.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Diego A., El Paso, October 2025.

People experienced heightened anxiety, depression, and desperation during these periods. Detained people submitted verbal and written requests for recreation and time outdoors which were disregarded by the guards. They then organized protests in desperation. We heard from 14 people across four housing units that Camp East Montana guards reacted to these protests with excessive force.

Rafael H. told Human Rights Watch he participated in a protest with his peers because they were confined without recreation for 10 days. He said:

A few weeks ago, my peers and I began kicking the door out of desperation. We need to see the sun. Masked guards in black gear ran toward us in a group of 10. They beat us and took some of us to the hole. Many of my peers have spent weeks in the hole [solitary confinement] incommunicado. The physical damage as well as the psychological damage is happening daily.⁹⁵

Martin G., 66, from Cuba, told us he went a month without seeing the sun. He and his peers similarly gathered by the door, desperate for recreation. He told us the pod guards called for back-up and, about five minutes after, guards dressed in all black arrived to beat anyone in their proximity. Martin said, “this wasn’t the only time it happened. This happens all the time. They are always beating us, anytime we have a disagreement or concern, they beat us.”⁹⁶

Beatings for Alleged Violations of Facility Rules

The people we interviewed told us they were beaten for alleged violations of facility rules. They said rules were not clearly communicated and guards did not appear to follow any procedure to assess rule breaking. Instead, they arbitrarily accused people of violating the rules, beat them, and placed them in solitary confinement as further punishment.

In one such case, Guzman R., 19, from Venezuela, told us facility guards beat him, crushed his testicles, and injured him to the point where he was hospitalized:

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Rafael H., El Paso, December 2025.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Martin G., El Paso, November 2025.

On or around October 17, 2025, I turned off a light on the way to the yard. That is what triggered an altercation with an officer who spoke Spanish. The officer started insulting me, and I sat down on the floor. After that, he called the second officer, and they had an exchange in English that I did not understand. Then both of them tried to cuff me. I didn't know why they were trying to cuff me. Then the rest of the officers started piling onto me and using their bodies to block the security camera. Blocking the camera with their bodies is a tactic I have seen them do before with other detained people.

Then, the officers body-slammed me and started to beat me. My front right tooth broke from the force of being slammed to the ground. Then, even more officers came. One of the officers grabbed my testicles and firmly crushed them. An officer forced his fingers deep into my ears. Since then, I have had a lot of trouble hearing out of my left ear. I can't hear as well now.

After cuffing me, the officers pulled my fingers back very painfully, almost to the point that it felt like my fingers might break. The officers continued beating me. An officer then started punching into the side and front of my mouth at which point I bit down on it. I was in so much pain and I still have marks from the incident on my body....

After a while, the officers stopped beating me. Then an officer held me up against the wall. I was dizzy and fighting to remain conscious. An officer started laughing at me quite a bit and making fun of the fact that I had chipped my tooth when I had been slammed to the ground. The guard told me I was like a little girl. Then, I believe three guards took me to the medical tent. My consciousness faded in the medical tent. When I regained consciousness, I was in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.⁹⁷

Guzman's case did not occur in isolation; we were told about other instances in which guards beat and injured detainees while making efforts to block or turn off cameras.

⁹⁷ ACLU of Texas, Declaration of G.R.F.C., paras. 12 -15, December 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/documents/fort-bliss-declarations-december-2025>.

Manuel D., 19, from Venezuela, told Human Rights Watch how he was beaten by guards and suffered a panic attack that caused respiratory issues:

On December 1, the guards came into my pod to do a check and found random pills on the floor near my bed. Without even asking me, they began to accuse me of hiding pills and selling them to other detainees. They tried to force me out of my bed, but I did not want to leave. I asked them to check cameras because the pills were not mine. I never even touched them. They did not care. They yanked me out of bed and folded my arms behind my back to handcuff me. They rushed me out of the pod to take me to SHU. I asked to see the captain because they were accusing me of smuggling pills and of selling them and I did not want to be punished. I kept telling them they were not mine.

They got angry and shoved my head against the wall. I overheard someone on the radio make a demand for the cameras to be turned off. This command caused me severe nerves and anxiety. I felt like throwing up and my legs instantly fell asleep. They did not care, they took me to SHU. I asked to see a doctor at SHU because I had an anxiety attack and convulsions. I told them I could not breathe and could not feel my feet. SHU agents kept saying I was lying and did not want to give me medical care. After about an hour and a half, I could not breathe or feel my legs. They brought in a small inhaler to help me breathe and had to carry me out of SHU and to the medic in a little bed.⁹⁸

Eduardo S., 49, from Honduras, was sitting at a table in his pod when a fight broke out between two men. He said anti-disturbance guards arrived in a large group of 15 to disperse the fight. As Eduardo was getting up to leave the table and avoid problems, he said two guards pushed him and punched him in the stomach.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Manuel D., El Paso, December 2025.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Eduardo S., El Paso, December 2025.

Camilo L., 32, from Colombia, told us about other instances in which anti-disturbance guards beat people in his pod. In one such instance, he saw guards beat a man with an ankle injury after the man had trouble getting up from a table that the guards were attempting to move. Camilo said he watched as the man was thrown to the ground where guards kicked him and stepped on his already injured ankle.¹⁰⁰

The Killing of Geraldo Lunas Campos

On Sunday, January 4, 2026, Human Rights Watch received a call from Ricardo H., a man detained at Camp East Montana. He told us Geraldo Lunas Campos, a 55-year-old Cuban man and father of four, had been beaten and asphyxiated to death by guards in the solitary confinement unit the night before.¹⁰¹

We later spoke to three others who saw or heard guards enter Lunas Campos's cell. Marco T. told Human Rights Watch what he saw and heard from a nearby cell:

Geraldo was handcuffed outside of his cell and asking for his medicine. Nurses were distributing medicine, so he said, "I need my medicine." The guards told him to shut up and to get in his cell. Geraldo refused and said he would enter once they gave him his medicine. Guards grabbed Geraldo and shoved him into the cell. They locked the door. The walls in SHU are very thin; I could hear everything. It sounded like guards were hitting Geraldo, like his body was being punched and slammed. Geraldo screamed for help. He said, "I can't breathe!" many times. They continued to beat him. He said, "You are suffocating me." Everything went silent.¹⁰²

Aaron R. said:

Around 10:30 pm, while medical staff was handing out medication in SHU, I overheard an altercation between a man I later learned was Geraldo and staff. Geraldo was asking for his medication before entering his cell. I

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Camilo L., El Paso, October 2025.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Ricardo H., January 2026.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with Marco T., El Paso, January 2026.

listened as guards began to yell at Geraldo for refusing to get into his cell. I then heard a struggle ensue. It sounded like the slamming of a person's body against the floor or the wall. I heard other detainees yell for help, and I heard Geraldo scream, "Me estás asfixiando" ["You're suffocating me"] and "No puedo respirar, que Dios me bendiga" ["I cannot breathe, may God bless me."] Those were Geraldo's last words: "I cannot breathe, may God bless me."

The yelling suddenly stopped, but I could hear people shuffling in and out of the SHU tent. I could also hear guards calling for help on their radios. I saw nurses and police rush in and out of SHU.

In the days following the incident, I personally saw facility staff and guards pull detainees for interviews about Geraldo's death.¹⁰³

Ismael M. told us:

I fled Honduras after my father was murdered. I know what death sounds like. It was extremely difficult to be confined to my cell while I heard Geraldo struggle and plead for his life. He did nothing wrong, he was just asking for his medication. I fear for my life at Camp East Montana. I know that what happened to Geraldo could have happened to me, it could have happened to any of us.¹⁰⁴

ICE's public statement on Lunas Campos's death said, "While in segregation, staff observed him in distress and contacted on-site medical personnel for assistance.... Medical staff responded, initiated lifesaving measures, and requested emergency medical services."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Aaron R., El Paso, TX, January 2026.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Ismael M., El Paso, January 2026.

¹⁰⁵ "ICE Reports Aggravated Felon and Convicted Child Sex Offender's Death at Camp East Montana in Texas," ICE, January 9, 2026 <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-reports-aggravated-felon-and-convicted-child-sex-offenders-death-camp-east> (accessed April 16, 2026).

An autopsy report by the El Paso County Medical Examiner's Office, however, found that Lunas Campos' body showed signs of a struggle, including abrasions on his chest and knees. He also had hemorrhages on his neck. The deputy medical examiner, Dr. Adam Gonzalez, determined the cause of death was asphyxia due to neck and torso compression. The medical examiner's report concluded "the manner of death is homicide."¹⁰⁶

Weeks after Lunas Campos's death, the four men who saw or heard his interaction with guards immediately prior to his death told us that the guards they believe to be responsible for his death were still working and overseeing detainees in SHU.

¹⁰⁶ Aaron Martinez, "Autopsy: Neck Hemorrhage, Rib Fractures in ICE Death Ruled a Homicide," USA Today, January 22, 2026 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/immigration/2026/01/21/migrants-geraldo-lunas-campos-death-at-el-paso-ice-center-ruled-a-homicide/88294285007/> (accessed April 16, 2026).

Failure to Provide Necessary Medical Care

Increased exposure to infectious disease, inadequate nutrition, substandard health care, punitive practices such as sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, physical and psychological abuse, and filth have a cumulative and measurable negative effect on people's health.¹⁰⁷ Clinicians have noted the severe impact that delayed access to care, medication interruptions, and barriers to mental health care have had on detained immigrants, even after release.¹⁰⁸

The US government failed to provide necessary health care for people detained at Camp East Montana. All of the people we interviewed described a failed medical care request, referral, and provision system. Human Rights Watch documented protracted delays and outright failures in the provision of medical care and medication, incomplete and inaccurate assessments by medical staff, and punitive responses to medical emergencies.

A Haphazard and Unresponsive Medical Request System

Officers have sheets of paper where we have to sign up for medical care. We include our name, A number,¹⁰⁹ and symptoms. That sheet is then handed over to another officer who is supposed to give it to the medical staff on site. I think this is where the breakdown happens, because we are never called to see the doctor.

—Benito L., interviewed in Fort Bliss, October 2025

¹⁰⁷ Altaf Saadi, Caitlin Patler, and Maria-Elena De Trinidad Young, "Cumulative Risk of Immigration Prison Conditions on Health Outcomes Among Detained Immigrants in California," *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, vol. 9 (2022), pp. 2518-32, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8628823/> (accessed April 16, 2026); Physicians for Human Rights, Immigration and Refugee Clinical Program at Harvard Law School, and Peeler Immigration Lab at Harvard Medical School, "Endless Nightmare: Torture and Inhuman Treatment in Solitary Confinement in U.S. Immigration Detention," February 6, 2024, <https://phr.org/our-work/resources/endless-nightmare-solitary-confinement-in-us-immigration-detention/> (accessed April 16, 2026).

¹⁰⁸ Kathryn Hampton, Ranit Mishori, Marsha Griffin, Claire Hillier, Elizabeth Pirrotta, and N. Ewen Wang, "Clinicians' Perceptions of the Health Status of Formerly Detained Immigrants," *BMC Public Health*, vol. 22 (2022), p. 1575, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8941369/> (accessed April 16, 2026).

¹⁰⁹ An A number (Alien Registration Number or Alien Number) is a unique 7, 8, or 9-digit number assigned to non-citizens by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

People detained in Camp East Montana told Human Rights Watch that the medical request system consists of a paper list that people in need of medical care fill out using a shared pencil. On the list, detainees provide their identifying information, including their name and A Number. The guards in charge of overseeing each pod are responsible for passing the paper list to supervising guards who are then supposed to forward the list to the medical care unit.

Dante, a detainee with a pre-existing heart condition who experienced increased heart palpitations and did not receive medical care despite many requests, told us, “I have signed up to see a doctor three times on the same request sheet and have never been called.... We submit many medical requests, but they do not even look at them. They throw them away.”¹¹⁰

Ruben M., who remained at Camp East Montana as of the writing of this report, commented on the unreliability of the request system and the anxiety it causes people in detention:

You have to be persistent for God knows how long until they finally come to your room. If you mess up and don’t write your name down daily, they will not call your name even if you are dying sick. They will not bring you out of the room. I kept having panic attacks when I first got here. I would wake up and could not go back to sleep. My heart was pounding. The idea that if I got sick I would get no help kept me up. That they would have to call a medical emergency for me to be able to see the doctor. That it might be too late.¹¹¹

Nearly all people interviewed told us that their requests for medical care or medication went unanswered.

Denial of Necessary Medication and Dangerously Inconsistent Medical Administration Schedules

At least 60 of the people we interviewed said immigration camp authorities failed to provide prescription medication and deliver it on a consistent basis. These failures put

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Dante S., El Paso, December 2025

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ruben M., El Paso, December 2025.

people who rely on predictable medication, including people with diabetes and people with heart conditions, in danger.

Orlando L., 40, Honduras, has a history of high blood pressure and requires regular medical treatment for this condition. His prescribed medications include Losartan 100mg twice daily and Aspirin. Prior to his detention, Orlando saw a cardiologist and received regular medical care to manage his blood pressure. Orlando's physician instructed him to maintain consistent medication, proper diet, adequate sleep, and low stress to prevent heart damage.

Orlando told Human Rights Watch that despite the facility's knowledge of his condition and required prescriptions, they repeatedly failed to distribute his medication:

Since my detention, I have experienced many delays and denials with my medications. I was initially placed in the *hielera* [freezing holding cell] when I got here. Despite informing staff of my medications, they were not given to me. A doctor attempted to see me but could not manage my medications. I experienced high blood pressure and bodily tremors during this period. I was informed by medical staff that I could not see a cardiologist at this facility and would need a specialist. Staff advised increasing my dosage . . . but my doctor had told me in the past that high doses were not safe for me.

Over the last two weeks, I have experienced high blood pressure episodes, bodily tremors, and weakness. Staff repeatedly attributed these symptoms to stress. I was sent to a psychologist despite my insistence that I was physically unwell. I signed up to see a doctor for eight consecutive days and still did not receive care. A nurse who distributes food initially refused to help with my medication, stating that if I was not on the list, it was not her issue. Eventually, another nurse intervened, provided my medication for that day, and gave a referral to an outside clinic to make sure I got care.

Despite repeated requests, my medication is still not available on a regular schedule. They sometimes say they don't have it at all. On December 18,

they told me my medication was ordered, but [days later] I have still not received it. Guards did not prioritize or understand the medical consequences of delaying my medications. I have requested testing and evaluation by a cardiologist. Staff informed me that all they could do was maintain me in a stable condition until my deportation.¹¹²

Facility staff also failed to provide medication to people with neurological conditions in at least one case. Renato S., 53, from Mexico, was living in Mound View, Minnesota, with his wife and two daughters prior to being detained by ICE. He has diabetes and neuropathy, a serious medical condition affecting his nerves that requires medication three times a day.

Renato told Human Rights Watch that he informed intake officers of his conditions and prescribed medication upon being processed. He emphasized that going without his nerve pain medication could cause irreversible damage. Renato said the facility made note of his conditions and told him they would contact the nurse about his prescription.

Despite multiple requests for medical care and medication to guards after processing, Renato never received medication to treat his neuropathy. Within days of being processed and without necessary treatment, Renato said that he began to experience numbness in his legs and feet:

I walk around my cell every night. I'm not sure if it helps, but I'm doing what I can to keep some feeling in my legs. I'm scared that I'll end up paralyzed. My idea is to keep my blood flowing by walking. If I do this, maybe I can avoid complications. So, I walk at night when I cannot sleep because of pain and numbness. The guards know about this. I have told them about my neuropathy and that I need to see a real doctor. They say they are trying, but I have only been taken to see a nurse who prescribed me sleeping pills.¹¹³

Renato's family expressed anxiety about his worsening health. His daughter told Human Rights Watch, "I am concerned he might die before his court date."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Orlando L., El Paso, December 2025.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Renato S., El Paso, January 2026.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Blanca S., January 2026.

Five people we interviewed with diabetes and pre-diabetes also told us they suffered complications because the facility failed to adhere to a consistent medicine administration schedule.

Valeria, 44, from Cuba, told us she has diabetes and requires pills and insulin to manage her condition. However, the facility administered insulin at irregular intervals, causing her blood sugar to spike and then drop too low, which could be life-threatening for someone with diabetes. Valeria was usually woken up at 4:00 a.m. for her first dose of insulin, which disrupted her sleep. She rarely received her second dose of insulin and the accompanying pill. She told us she experiences severe headaches, fatigue, and nausea as a result of missing her medication.¹¹⁵

The facility's failure to provide medication and adhere to a regular administration schedule worsened people's health and pre-existing conditions.

Tomás M., 52, from Mexico, was pre-diabetic before arriving at Ft. Bliss. He told us he now has diabetes because the facility failed to distribute the medication and insulin he was prescribed to regulate his blood sugar and pressure. At the time of our interview, he had gone 15 days without either of his prescribed pills and had not received any insulin at all.

People also told us that they believed the failure to administer necessary medication caused medical emergencies in their units.

Cesar, 30, from Nicaragua, said a diabetic man from Venezuela in his pod once went over a week without insulin. One night, after dinner, the man began to feel very ill and notified the guards. The guards did not bring help and the man eventually fainted. Cesar gathered with other detainees and began to kick the door in panic. It was only then that the guards called the medic. Cesar told us that the medic did not want to enter the pod, so he and other detained people had to carry the man out of the pod.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Valeria C., El Paso, October 2025.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Cesar R., El Paso, December 2025.

At least 3 people we interviewed with gastrointestinal illnesses were also affected by the facility's neglect.

Diego A., 34, from Colombia, has an ulcer, chronic gastrointestinal issues, and anxiety. Prior to being detained, he took medication for gastritis and anxiety, among other medications. When we met Diego, he had gone for five days without any medication, despite daily requests to guards in his pod.

Diego also told us that even on days when he did receive medication, he experienced delays of up to three hours, particularly during nighttime distribution. He told us the constant changes to the administration of his medication, combined with the frequent failure to administer it, caused him to vomit blood daily. When Diego asked the guards why his requests for medication and medical care were going unanswered, he said they told him, "It is not our issue. We sent your request and medical staff is supposed to respond."

Diego told Human Rights Watch, "I doubt they even sent my request to the doctor."¹¹⁷

Failure to Provide Necessary and Timely Medical Care

The first thing the doctor tells us is, "We have more than 4,000 people to attend to here, please be patient. Unless you have a serious emergency, practically one where you are about to die, we won't treat you."

—Mateo H., interviewed in Fort Bliss, October 2025

Lucia H., 35, from Ecuador, has an eye condition and says she is at risk of permanent vision loss because Camp East Montana failed to provide timely medical care and medication. Lucia told us she uses a glass contact lens to protect her left cornea. The glass lens requires daily care including eye drops every two hours, it also needs to be removed every day using a special device to prevent irreversible eye damage. Prior to being detained, Lucia saw an ophthalmologist regularly to maintain her eye health and prevent long-term issues with her vision. She followed her ophthalmologist's eye care advice and never experienced complications. She told us:

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Diego A., El Paso, October 2025.

During my transfer to Camp East Montana on or about Sunday, January 11, 2026, my eye became irritated as a result of being forced to wear the glass contact lens overnight. It began to swell and turn red. I felt severe pain. It felt and looked like my eye had turned into a ball of blood. I asked the intake officers for help immediately at processing; I explained my condition and told them I needed to remove my contact lens using the required device immediately to avoid permanent damage.

The officers told me they could not help me and that I would have to wait. They placed me in a small holding cell where I was held overnight and, despite my many requests, they refused to take me to a doctor to have my lens removed. The next morning on or about Monday, January 12, 2026, I was shackled and taken to a nearby clinic. At this point, I could no longer see. I was in extreme pain and my eye was bleeding.¹¹⁸

Lucia was told by doctors that she had developed a serious eye infection, and she was diagnosed with glaucoma. She told us that according to a doctor, she is at risk of permanent vision loss.

Ricardo H., from Cuba, is pre-diabetic. At the time of our interview, Ricardo had been detained at Camp East Montana for over 3 months. Ricardo developed an ulcer the size of a quarter on the bottom of his foot during his time in detention; he showed his ulcer to our team. Despite repeated requests for medical care, Ricardo told us he never received appropriate care for his ulcer. Ricardo also told us that after many requests, a nurse took a look at it once while distributing medicine and gave him ointment.

Ricardo told Human Rights Watch:

I'm a pre-diabetic. The guards have been refusing to take me to medical for my ulcer. It's reckless. I could be injured for life. My ulcer has gone untreated for almost three months. I have submitted daily medical requests

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Lucia H., El Paso, March 2026.

and have even written to ICE using the tablets. ICE never writes back. I think the complaints we write are discarded.¹¹⁹

Failure to Respond to Medical Emergencies and Retaliation for Requesting Care

The only way we get medical care around here is if we collapse. If our pain is internal or not visible, the guards do not view it as urgent. They ignore us.

—Emiliano S., interviewed in Fort Bliss, November 2025

Human Rights Watch interviewed two people who experienced medical emergencies and had to kick doors, go on hunger strikes, or otherwise protest to get medical care while detained at Camp East Montana. Their profiles are detailed below.

Human Rights Watch interviewed Martin G., 66 years old, from Havana, Cuba. Martin is a testicular cancer survivor, has had a partial lung removal and other past surgeries that require close medical monitoring and medication. Prior to being detained, Martin regularly saw a specialist and took medication to address his conditions. During his processing at Camp East Montana in September, Martin informed officers about his chronic medical conditions and specified the medication he needed to take. He stated that he needed to see a doctor immediately as it had been over a month since his last check-in. Guards told him they would put his name down on the list, but his request went unaddressed for months.

While detained at Camp East Montana, Martin's chronic conditions worsened. He experienced severe headaches, trouble breathing, low oxygen levels, and lightheadedness that made it difficult for him to leave his bunk bed.

Despite daily requests made verbally and in writing, he was never taken to see medical staff.

Martin told Human Rights Watch:

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ricardo H., El Paso, December 2025.

I'm scared that I will die here.... it is humiliating to ask for help daily and be ignored. I can tell the guards don't care, maybe they don't think we are human. It's like they want to see us suffer. I worry that it will be too late if they ever do take me to the doctor. The only thing keeping me going is the thought of my wife and my three grandchildren, my babies. I have survived before and I hope I can do it again.

Human Rights Watch met Martin in November 2025 while he was engaged in a hunger strike to bring attention to his medical condition and his dire need for medication. Martin told us that the guards tried to force him to eat on at least three occasions and that as punishment for his pleas for medical help and self-advocacy, he was placed in the solitary confinement unit. Martin had spent seven days in isolation when we interviewed him. At the time, Martin was managing his pain using ibuprofen and Advil he received at the last detention center where he was held.

We learned Martin was transferred to an ICE facility in Missouri in January 2026.

His wife told Human Rights Watch she worries that he has suffered irreversible damage and that he will not survive detention. She said, "I pray for my husband's health every day. I pray that he will live and that I will be able to hug him again. I don't know if I ever will. What they have done to him, and to others like him, should be a crime."¹²⁰

Enrique R., 44, from Cuba, said he has history of heart attacks. When he was previously at a federal prison, Enrique saw a doctor regularly and was being treated with medication. He told Human Rights Watch that he is able to recognize his symptoms and take appropriate steps to address them, but he has not been able to do so at Camp East Montana:

When I got here, I let the guards know that I had heart problems and that I was getting treatment at the federal prison. They said they would make a note on my file. No one followed up about it.... I know my condition got worse here. I am under stress, not receiving medication, getting very little food, and having to fight for my basic rights daily. It's impossible for this

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Lidia S., January 2026.

not to impact my health, especially after being imprisoned here for three months... So, my health has gotten worse. On December 31 in the morning, I began to experience chest pain. I let the guards know and reminded them that I have a history of heart attacks. They ignored me at first. The chest pain got worse. I got really anxious and insisted that I needed to be taken to the hospital. I banged hard on the door and told them if I died it would be their fault. At that point, they handcuffed me and rushed me out of the pod.

Enrique says he was taken to a nearby hospital and was in the emergency room for 12 hours with cuffs around his wrists and ankles. He recalled the guard who was accompanying him telling him he was “a criminal” and did not “deserve to be seen by a doctor.” Enrique told us that after he was stabilized, the emergency room doctor diagnosed him with a heart infection that would need follow-up care and evaluation with a cardiologist. Despite this referral, Enrique was not taken to see a cardiologist for follow-up care by Camp East Montana staff.¹²¹

Enrique returned to his pod the next day and reported ongoing chest pain and high blood pressure. He says he has continued to request a visit to the cardiologist in writing and verbally, but his requests have been denied.

Human Rights Watch contacted ICE’s El Paso Field Office in January to flag Enrique R.’s case of urgent need for medical care. ICE never confirmed whether the person in need of care received necessary treatment.

Death of Francisco Gaspar Cristóbal Andrés

Francisco Gaspar Cristóbal Andrés reportedly died of liver and kidney failure while he was in government custody at Camp East Montana. The Department of Homeland Security issued the following statement on his death:

EL PASO, Texas — An illegal alien from Guatemala in ICE custody died at 5:53 a.m. Dec. 3 at The Hospitals of Providence East.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Enrique R., January 2026.

Francisco Cristobal Gaspar-Andres, 48, was pronounced dead by medical professionals. He was admitted Nov. 16 to the El Paso area hospital and while cause of death is pending, medical staff attributed it to natural liver and kidney failure. From the moment they were notified of his health crisis, ICE medical staff ensured he had constant, high-quality care....

On Nov. 14, an immigration judge ordered Gaspar-Andres removed to Guatemala. Over the following days, medical staff at Camp East Montana continued to treat him for fever, body aches, productive cough with phlegm, jaundice, severe left lower extremity edema and hypertension. On Nov. 16, he was admitted to The Hospitals of Providence due to low sodium levels. Three days later, hospital medical staff diagnosed him with hyponatremia. Days later, Gaspar-Andres was lethargic and showed poor improvement. He received antibiotics and intravenous fluids.

On Nov. 19, an MRI showed that Gaspar-Andres had pansinusitis. Hospital medical professionals continued treatment and attempted to identify the source of his infection as he continued to decline and remained septic. He was intubated Nov. 21, and Nov. 24 he was placed on a liver transplant list and placed on dialysis and palliative care.

On Nov. 26, hospital medical staff reported Gaspar-Andres was receiving hemodialysis and was visited by a priest.

He continued dialysis until Dec. 1, when he was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit due to hypotension during dialysis.

His health continued to decline further and was diagnosed with renal failure and internal bleeding. Medical staff placed him on supplemental oxygen for comfort. He was pronounced dead Dec. 3.¹²²

¹²² “Illegal Alien from Guatemala in ICE Custody Dies at Local Hospital from Suspected Natural Causes: Liver, Kidney Failure,” Immigration and Customs Enforcement, December 5, 2025, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/illegal-alien-guatemala-ice-custody-dies-local-hospital-suspected-natural-causes> (accessed April 16, 2026).

Human Rights Watch interviewed Francisco's daughter after his death was formally reported. Her account raises doubts about the DHS version of the events before Francisco's death, in particular whether he received timely and appropriate medical care. His daughter told us in a written statement:

I want to express how my family and I are feeling at this moment because of the loss of my dad and because of what he suffered while detained in the immigration detention center.

My dad told me that he was suffering greatly in that jail due to the lack of food, the lack of medical care, and the conditions of the place. My dad went hungry; they punished them and did not give them food, or sometimes they gave them food that was expired or spoiled.

They also did not provide medical care in a timely manner; they always ignored them.

My dad was taken to the hospital when he was already dying, and it was too late. Now my dad is resting in peace.

My family and I are suffering deeply from the loss of my dad. I do not want other immigrant brothers and sisters to suffer what I am suffering. I demand that those who remain in that center be treated properly and that someone be sent to supervise and look after the other people there.

We are not criminals. The only "crime" for many is coming to this country to seek a better future for our children. I demand justice for my dad, Francisco Gaspar Cristóbal Andrés.¹²³

Francisco's daughter told us that she spoke with him on the phone at least once per week leading up to his hospitalization. During those conversations, Francisco told her about the issues he was experiencing in receiving timely medical care.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Francisco Gaspar Cristóbal Andrés' daughter, December 2025.

We also heard from other people held in Camp East Montana that Francisco had not received medical care immediately before he died. Germán L. told us, “There was a death here a few weeks ago. He had fever at first. I know he asked for help and did not get it.”¹²⁴

Francisco’s death in government custody, and his daughter’s statement that he had complained of lack of medical care before his hospitalization, raises questions about the willingness and capacity of Camp East Montana staff to provide necessary medical care to people in detention.

Germán L. said:

“We are truly in a place where any medical emergency could happen and they would not care. The people here do not have the capacity to tend to our needs.”¹²⁵

Indeed, ICE’s own investigations, conducted within 50 days of the camp’s opening, identified over 60 violations of federal standards, including the facility’s failure to properly monitor and treat detainees’ medical conditions.¹²⁶

Reacting to the government’s statement after Francisco’s death, Ruben M. said:

The truth is we get terrible food, tiny portions, no medication, and no medical help when we need it. The government also said they give us the best treatment possible. Best treatment possible? We get no treatment.¹²⁷

Human Rights Watch and the ACLU notified the Department of Homeland Security in December of 2025 of documented failures to provide medical care and violations of federal

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Germán L., El Paso, December 2025.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Germán L., El Paso, December 2025.

¹²⁶ Douglas MacMillan, Samuel Oakford, N. Kirkpatrick, and Aaron Shaffer, “60 Violations in 50 Days: Inside ICE’s giant tent facility at Ft. Bliss,” Washington Post, September 16, 2025 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/09/16/ice-detention-center-immigration-violations/> (accessed April 16, 2026).

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with Ruben M., El Paso, December 2025.

standards at Camp East Montana in a coalition letter. DHS did not respond to our requests to meet and did not offer a written response to our letter.

Mental Health Care

Some detainees arrived with prior mental health conditions, which they said were exacerbated by the physical and psychological toll of conditions of confinement at Camp East Montana. Others said they did not suffer from anxiety or depression prior to being detained, but were now experiencing anxiety, depression and in severe cases, suicidal thoughts.¹²⁸

Human Rights Watch interviewed Ismael M., 28, from Honduras, was detained at Camp East Montana for more than five months. Ismael told Human Rights Watch that he was experiencing suicidal thoughts as a result of his prolonged detention and the inhuman conditions he was subjected to:

I sometimes look at my bed sheets, and I wonder if it would be easier to hang myself instead of trying to survive this torture. I don't know how to describe what I'm feeling. I feel forgotten. People have died here and no one cares. I've gone a month without seeing the sun.... I am forced to live in filth.... I have been taken from my family, from my home, and I know that no matter how long they keep me here, they will end up deporting me. I'm so afraid I will get killed once I am sent back. That is why I left. I can't sleep most nights, that's when I have the hardest time.

When asked if he had sought or been referred to mental health care at Camp East Montana, he said that he had been taken to the onsite counselor a handful of times, but they did little to help. The counselor prescribed sleeping pills, told him to engage in breathing exercises, and said he should visualize his “happy place” when he had trouble sleeping or experienced anxiety.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Ismael M., El Paso, December 2025; Human Rights Watch Interview with Emiliano S., El Paso, November 2025.

“What good does it do to imagine a ‘happy place’?” he asked. “How absurd for a supposed medical professional to suggest that I could close my eyes, take deep breaths and escape my reality when I am forced to survive here. When my reality is probably going end with my death in my home country. Sleeping pills won’t fix that.”¹²⁹

Emiliano S., 37, Nicaragua, described similar feelings:

I have become very stressed and anxious. So much so that I have at times considered hanging myself with a sheet.... I sometimes feel like slamming my head on the wall.... If the pain is internal or not visible, the guards do not view it as urgent. They ignore us. I have only seen a psychologist once, at processing. Before coming to the detention center, I did not take sleeping pills but since arriving I have had to take them and have now requested an increase in my dosage. It’s the only way my mind can rest.

Emiliano told Human Rights Watch that he repeatedly sought psychological help at the facility. “About 15 days ago, I requested psychological care and I have yet to receive a response. The only way we get medical care around here is if we collapse.”¹³⁰

Reported Suicide at Camp East Montana

Victor Manuel Diaz, a 36, from Nicaragua, was arrested in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during ICE’s Operation Metro Surge and transferred to Camp East Montana, died in custody on January 14. In a press release, ICE stated security staff found Diaz unconscious and unresponsive in his room. ICE presumes his death was a suicide; however, the official cause of his death remains under investigation.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Ismael M., El Paso, January 2026.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with Emiliano S., El Paso, November 2025.

¹³¹ “ICE Reports Death of Illegal Alien in Custody in El Paso,” Immigration and Customs Enforcement, January 18, 2026, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-reports-death-illegal-alien-custody-el-paso>

Coercive and Violent Third Country Removals

They said, “Your country won’t take you; leave now or we’ll lock you up for life.”

—Ramiro G., describing the options ICE agents gave him, Fort Bliss, December 2025

Camp East Montana guards twice attempted to forcibly expel Ramiro G., 45, from Cuba, to Mexico—a country he has no ties to, he told Human Rights Watch. He described the first attempt:

On September 22, I was woken up by a group of guards around midnight and told I was being transferred to another detention center. Two guards pulled me from my bunk bed and escorted me to the hallway. I was immediately chained with cuffs on my hands and feet. I could hardly move because the cuffs were so tight. I was rushed out of the tent and rounded up in a dirt lot with about 15 other men, mostly Cuban, with three or four Venezuelans. We were all forced onto an unmarked bus. It all happened so fast, I was disoriented and felt like I was being kidnapped.

When I asked the guards where I was being taken, they yelled at me to be quiet. The bus drove for one to two hours. As time passed without any answers, I became very worried and stressed. I felt as though I couldn’t breathe and was going to faint. Eventually, the bus stopped. At that point, the guards told us we were at the border, they ordered us to get off the bus and cross the street to get on another bus that would take us to Mexico. I am not Mexican, I never signed a deportation to Mexico, and I never even had the chance to talk to a judge.

I told the guards that I had not signed my deportation and asked to see a deportation paper. They refused. So I refused to get off and board the other bus. The guards told me that if I did not leave, I would be charged as a criminal and imprisoned. They said, “Your country won’t take you; leave now or we’ll lock you up for life.” I told them I am Cuban, I have no ties to

Mexico, and I am afraid of being deported there because I was kidnapped by a Mexican cartel in the past.

After some time, the guards gave up and stopped trying to force me to leave. Some men did cross into Mexico, I imagine they were afraid of the threats. The rest of us, about four of us, refused to get off the bus and were taken back to Texas.¹³²

Ramiro's daughter told us that guards attempted to expel him a second time on December 15, 2025:

Last night at 6:20PM three officers tried to get Ramiro to leave voluntarily, they came into his unit very aggressive, he explained that he wasn't going to Mexico and the officers told him that they were going to press federal charges on him and send him to prison. They also said they would be coming back to get him today in the morning to take him out because they were placing him first on the list to get on the bus.¹³³

Ramiro told us guards called his name at around 6:30 pm on December 15. The guards told him he was being transferred to Otero County Processing Center and that federal charges would be pressed against him if he did not comply. As he was escorted to the hallway along with other detainees, he overheard a guard say they were going to the Santa Teresa port of entry.¹³⁴ A guard then told Ramiro that the transfer to Santa Teresa was being carried out "in secret."

Upon hearing this, Ramiro feared for his safety and began shaking uncontrollably. He told the guards he had extreme fear of being returned to Mexico, especially because it was being done in secret and without court orders and because he had previously been kidnapped in Mexico for one week and faced serious risk if he returned. Ramiro cried out

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with Ramiro G., El Paso, December 2025.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch text conversation with Ramiro G.'s daughter, December 2025.

¹³⁴ A port of entry is a place where a person can enter a country, usually after undergoing immigration and customs formalities. The Santa Teresa port of entry is on the US-Mexico border, about 16 miles (26 kilometers) west of Camp East Montana.

for help, and other men started banging on the door in protest, demanding that he be returned to his cell. He was eventually returned to his cell.

Ramiro told Human Rights Watch, “What they did was lie to us, because they told us we were going to be taken to other detention centers. Had I known that they were trying to force us to cross to Mexico again, I would have refused to leave my bed. I never agreed or signed my deportation to Mexico. I told them this many times.”¹³⁵

The US government has employed third-country deportations and expulsions,¹³⁶ sending people to countries other than their own, as part of its aggressive mass deportation effort. The federal government has also used third-country transfers in cases in which people could not be deported to their home countries for various reasons, including a fear of return or risk of torture.

At least 50 people at Camp East Montana alleged the federal government used coercive and violent tactics to intimidate them to abandon their immigration court cases. According to at least 17 people we interviewed, guards threatened people with expulsion to third countries, and in the cases of Cuban and Venezuelan men, attempted to expel them to Mexico by force and without a court order or other due process.

Benjamin, 49, from Cuba, described the scene at the border in a sworn declaration to the ACLU of Texas:

When we got to the border crossing, there was one bus on the U.S. side and one bus on the Mexico side. I was on the bus on the U.S. side. The bus on the Mexican side is for those who go to Mexico to go farther in. The 12 people at the front of the bus got off. I have not seen them again. Approximately seven masked men who looked like military men, but without badge numbers showed up. They got onto the bus that I was still on. When they couldn't succeed in intimidating me and the others who

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ramiro G., El Paso, December 2025.

¹³⁶ In this report, Human Rights Watch uses the term “deportation” to refer to any transfer outside the United States following an order of “removal” as that term is used in the Immigration and Nationality Act (including expedited removal orders and reinstatement of prior removal orders). We use “expulsion” to refer to any transfer outside the United States that does not comply with these processes.

were still on the bus, they left. I was later brought back to the unit where they continued threatening me about taking me to another country. These threats feel like mental torture.

Approximately a week ago, guards told me that Cuba will never accept me, but Mexico will accept me. They told me if I don't sign the document, they would send me to a prison in the heart of Arizona and that I'd have four months in prison and then they would send me to Mexico anyway.¹³⁷

Other detainees also told us that officers beat those who refused to consent to their expulsion to Mexico. Isaac, 43, from Cuba, stated the following in a sworn declaration:

On a day approximately September 15-17, 2025, the guards used force against me because they tried to take me to Mexico and I told them I don't want to be taken there. The guards came into my housing unit and told me I was going to be deported. When I asked them where, they told me I will be taken to Mexico. I told them “no,” at which point those guards left. However, they came back with about 30 other guards. Outside in the hallway, the guards started beating on me.

The guards hit my head. They slammed it against the wall approximately 10 times. They squeezed and twisted my ankles. The guards also grabbed and crushed my testicles between their fingers, which was very painful and humiliating. I felt like I was being sexually assaulted. After the guards slammed my head against the wall, I had severe pain behind my ears. I couldn't even touch the left side of my head for about a month because of the pain....

From there they took me with about 20 people on a bus to what they said was Mexico.... A guard told us that our countries don't accept us, so Mexico is a good option and that if don't want to go to Mexico then we would either be sent to a jail cell in El Salvador or to Africa. They tried to pressure us to

¹³⁷ ACLU of Texas, Declaration of Benjamin, December 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/documents/fort-bliss-declarations-december-2025>.

go to Mexico by threatening us in these ways. Then, after I refused to go to Mexico, they brought me back on the bus. Just two people came back on the bus with me: a Nicaraguan man, and another Cuban man. The rest went to Mexico.¹³⁸

Benjamin, from Cuba, said he was similarly called up by guards to sign deportation documents. When he refused to approve his deportation to Mexico or leave the facility to board the bus, he recounted a violent scene in a sworn declaration:

When I refused to leave the room, a guard grabbed me and slammed me down and it hurt me so much that I had pain on my back for approximately two weeks. The guard beat me just because I was refusing to be cuffed and taken to Mexico. The guards also beat several other people. The guards threw me against the floor and approximately 4-5 guards came down on me until they cuffed me. This caused pain to the back of my head.

Then, the guards took me on a bus with approximately 13 people to a part of the border called St. Teresa.... My wrists and ankles were cuffed. They put a sort of iron belt around my waist and attached my cuffed wrists to it. I continued to feel a lot of pain because they had slammed me against the floor. The bus ride took approximately 40 minutes.... When we arrived at what I understand to be St. Teresa, the guards took off our metal cuffs and put plastic cuffs on us.

The area was on what appeared to be a large hill and it seemed high enough that my ears started to clog like when on an airplane. There were other people there who were wearing black masks on their faces with only a hole for their eyes. They told us to walk toward the Mexican bus. There was a bus to Mexico on one side and the bus back to the U.S. on the other. I started feeling very anxious at this point and I started yelling and screaming at the immigration guard in Mexico that this is a kidnapping and I don't want to be taken. The guard from Mexico then said that they don't want

¹³⁸ ACLU of Texas, Declaration of Isaac, December 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/documents/fort-bliss-declarations-december-2025>.

anyone who was going to be forced to go to Mexico. If I hadn't started kicking and screaming at that moment, I believe I might have been taken to Mexico. I was doing everything I possibly could to not be taken to Mexico.¹³⁹

Based on these accounts, it appears that the US government employed a combination of physical force, threats, and deceit to induce detained people to cross to Mexico as part of clandestine and coercive third-country expulsions.

The people we interviewed told us they did not receive a deportation order or any explanation of legal authority for their removal, despite asking to see court orders.

The reported expulsions under threat and without deportation orders or due process in most cases would be in clear violation of US law. They are also in violation of international treaties ratified by the United States. Moreover, the threats and excessive use of force employed by Camp East Montana guards to coerce detained people is unlawful.

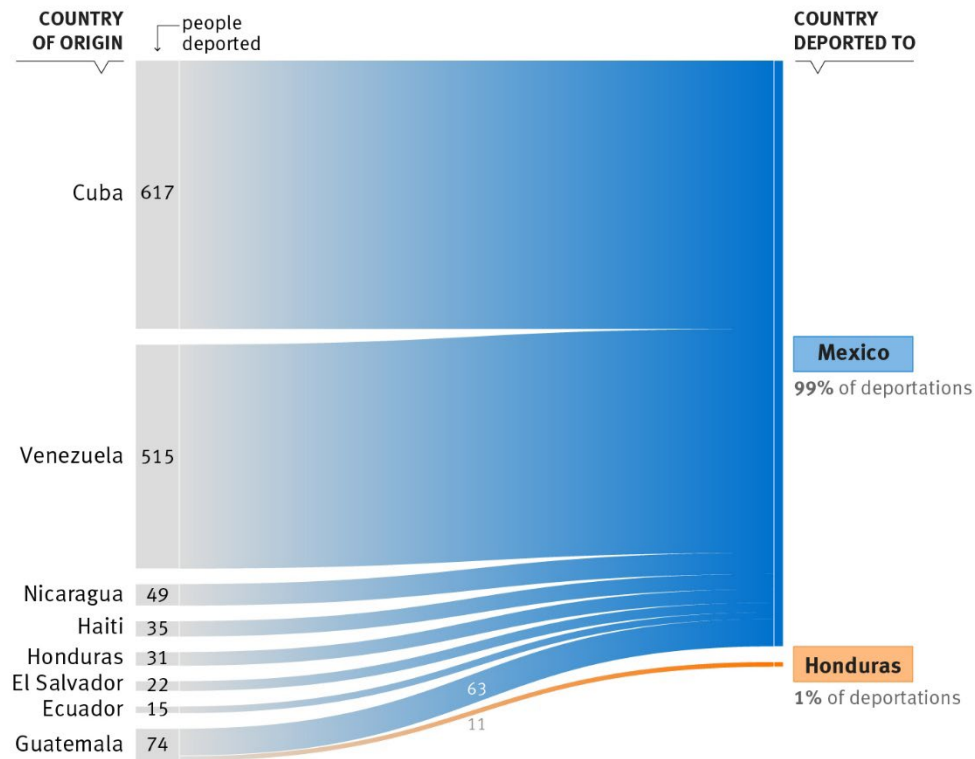
The US government has denied that abusive third country deportations or expulsions have taken place. Former DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin told the *Washington Post* in December 2025 that “no detainees are being beaten or abused” and that all people being sent to third countries are given due process protections.¹⁴⁰

Between August 2025 and early March 2026, DHS carried out nearly 1,350 third-country transfers to Mexico from Camp East Montana, as detailed in the chart on the following page.

¹³⁹ ACLU of Texas, Declaration of Benjamin, December 2025, <https://www.aclu.org/documents/fort-bliss-declarations-december-2025>

¹⁴⁰ Douglas MacMillan, “ACLU Claims ICE Agents Beat Detainees Who Refused Removal to Mexico,” *Washington Post*, December 8, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/12/08/ice-detainees-abuse-aclu-fort-bliss/> (accessed April 16, 2026).

Third Country Deportations Following Camp East Montana Detention August 1, 2025 – March 9, 2026



Source: Human Rights Watch analysis of ICE ERO data provided in response to a FOIA request to the Deportation Data Project

Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch

Obstructions to Obtaining Legal Counsel and Attending Court Hearings

The US government has denied people detained at Camp East Montana meaningful access to counsel. The people we interviewed consistently reported the facility lacked a functional law library, said they faced significant barriers to making confidential and reliable legal calls, and described unreasonable restrictions on legal visitation.

No Functional Law Library or Legal Materials

ICE's 2025 National Detention Standards call on facilities to "permit detainees access to a law library, and provide legal materials, facilities, equipment, printing and copying privileges, and the opportunity to prepare legal documents."¹⁴¹ Facilities should also "devise a flexible schedule to permit all detainees, regardless of housing or classification, to use the law library on a regular basis," guaranteeing a minimum of five hours per week during reasonable hours. Detained people may not be forced to forgo recreation time to access the library, and requests for additional time, particularly when facing court deadlines, should be accommodated whenever possible.

People detained at Camp East Montana informed Human Rights Watch that no functional law library exists. All interviewees stated that they had no meaningful access to printing or copying equipment to prepare legal filings or applications for relief. Although tablet devices are available, they did not contain legal research tools, and the internet service necessary to use them was frequently unavailable. While the tablets theoretically allowed people to contact legal service providers, calls required funds in a detainee's account, a prohibitive barrier for many.

In addition, approximately six tablets were shared among roughly 72 people in each pod, severely limiting access. The failure to provide even basic legal research tools, document preparation resources, or reliable communication channels undermines people's ability to prepare their cases and meaningfully access counsel in immigration court proceedings.

¹⁴¹ NDS 2025 § 6.3.

Lack of Confidential and Reliable Attorney Phone Access

ICE standards call on facilities to provide “a sufficient number of telephones” that enable people in detention to make legal calls privately and without being overheard.¹⁴² At Camp East Montana, however, all outbound legal calls are placed from shared tablets located in open tent areas, within earshot of guards and other detainees. People report that this arrangement renders legal calls inherently non-confidential.

Compounding these concerns, some people in detention reported that they never received functioning personal identification numbers during processing, leaving them unable to place calls at all.¹⁴³

Unreasonable Barriers to Legal Visitation

ICE’s standards call on facilities to allow legal visitation seven days a week, including holidays, with at least eight hours of visitation on regular business days and four hours on weekends and holidays.¹⁴⁴ Despite this standard, all three of El Paso’s primary legal aid organizations told us they were turned away during business-day visitation hours listed on ICE’s website. Legal service providers offering pro bono representation described waiting up to four hours to see clients, only to be told that the person was “unavailable” due to periodic headcounts or meal distribution.¹⁴⁵

Facility officers also informed a legal service provider that people in detention sometimes refuse legal visits because the detention center does not give them food, water, or access to bathrooms while they are waiting and does not allow them to make up missed meals or medication distributions.¹⁴⁶ In at least one instance, an attorney was told a detained person had refused a visit when the detained person did not even know of the request: Aaron R. told us he learned after the fact that an attorney had tried to schedule a visit with him; the attorney said facility authorities had said Aaron refused to meet but Aaron was never even told of the attorney’s request for a visit.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Ibid. § 5.4.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch Interview with Benito L., El Paso, October 2025.

¹⁴⁴ NDS 2025 § 5.5.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch Interviews with Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, El Paso, October 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with Aaron R., El Paso, January 2026.

Attorneys also told us that visitation rules change frequently and without notice. At times, officers have imposed a 10-visit-per-day limit per organization or other limits on pre-representation legal visits, according to two of El Paso’s legal aid organizations.¹⁴⁸ Such limitations appear to be inconsistent with ICE’s own standards, which do not include numerical caps on pre-representation visits.

During Human Rights Watch’s legal visits, particularly those conducted over video call, we encountered similar issues. On three instances, our visits were canceled without prior notice. Some of our visits were delayed for over two hours and guards told us it was because they had to conduct their daily count. In one instance guards told us via email that they denied a detained man a legal call with us as punishment for alleged violations of facility rules.

By imposing these arbitrary restrictions, Camp East Montana impeded attorneys’ ability to assess cases, establish representation, and provide meaningful legal assistance.

Failure to Transport People to Scheduled Court Hearings

Immigration courts are administrative courts within the US Department of Justice. They hear the cases of noncitizens the government is attempting to deport, among other matters.

According to 6 people interviewed, the US government often failed to take detained people to their scheduled immigration court hearings on time. This resulted in them missing their hearings and, in extreme cases, waiting up to three additional months to see an immigration judge.

Rafael H., who missed his court hearing after guards did not take him to court on time, told Human Rights Watch:

If you have court in the morning, they take you from your room at 9 p.m. the night before. They take you to a small freezing room where there are no beds with at least 20-30 other people, you have to sit up all night. It’s impossible to sleep. They wake you up and take you on a bus at around 4 or

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, El Paso, October 2025, Human Rights Watch Interviews with Estrella del Paso, El Paso, October 2025.

5 a.m. Despite being taken on the bus early, you are forced to wait on a bus for about 3 hours, with the AC on full blast. We have very thin sweaters, and it is the middle of winter, it's cruel. They don't start driving the bus until 8 or 8:30 a.m. This means that a lot of us with early court hearings lose our opportunity to see a judge.

It's almost as if they have a handbook on how to inflict psychological pain. We wait months for our court dates to fight our cases, to defend our positions, and it's as if they had a handbook on psychological torture because by the time we have court, most want to sign their deportation, people want to give up. I met a man who was taken to court late many times, his chance to see a judge kept getting postponed because of the guards.¹⁴⁹

Vicente H., who was detained at Camp East Montana for four months at the time of our visit, similarly said, "It is ridiculous that we are taken from our rooms the night before and still miss court because the guards cause delays. We are completely at their mercy."¹⁵⁰

People also said that when they appeared in court, immigration judges often rescheduled their hearings, presumably in an effort to manage large caseloads but causing delays and prolonging uncertainty and time in detention. Vicente H. said that the immigration judge postponed his case for three months after he had arrived in court prepared to explain why he was seeking asylum, "This was devastating. I immediately broke down and began to cry."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Rafael H., El Paso, December 2025.

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with Vicente H., El Paso, December 2025.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Vicente H., El Paso, December 2025.

International Human Rights Law

Denial of Essential Medical Care

Human Rights Watch documented grave deficiencies in the medical care request and delivery system at Camp East Montana. People told us they submitted repeated written and verbal requests for medical attention that went unanswered for weeks, and that medical care was frequently provided only after people collapsed or experienced acute medical emergencies.

This apparently pervasive and systemic medical neglect implicates fundamental human rights, including international legal protections for the right to health and the rights of detained persons as set forth in treaties the United States has ratified.

Under international law, people who are detained have the right to be treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent dignity, including access to appropriate medical care. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) requires governments to provide “adequate medical care during detention.”¹⁵² The United Nations Human Rights Committee, which issues authoritative interpretations of the ICCPR, has further emphasized that states have a positive obligation toward people who are particularly vulnerable due to their status as persons deprived of liberty.¹⁵³

The failure to provide adequate medical care can also amount to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, in violation of the Convention against Torture¹⁵⁴ and the ICCPR.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), arts. 6, 7, 10(1), December 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171 (entered into force March 23, 1976, ratified by the United States June 8, 1992); *Pinto v. Trinidad and Tobago*, Communication No. 232/1987, Human Rights Committee, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/39/D/232/1987 (1990).

¹⁵³ United Nations Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 21: Article 10 (Humane Treatment of Prisoners Deprived of Their Liberty), 44th sess. (1992), para. 3, in *Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies*, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.8 (May 8, 2006), p. 192.

¹⁵⁴ UN Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations: New Zealand, in *Report of the Committee against Torture*, GAOR, 53d sess., Suppl. No. 44 (1998), para. 175.

¹⁵⁵ ICCPR, art. 7.

Excessive Use of Force

We heard repeated and consistent accounts that guards at Camp East Montana beat and otherwise physically abused detainees. In the specific case of Geraldo Lunas Campos, whose death the El Paso County Medical Examiner’s Office found was caused by homicide,¹⁵⁶ the evidence strongly suggests that guards used excessive force and asphyxiated him, thereby depriving him of his life. In other cases, beatings by guards resulted in serious bodily and psychological harm.

All persons who are deprived of their liberty have the right to conditions of confinement that are compatible with their personal dignity.¹⁵⁷ In the context of immigration detention, the US government must guarantee detained people’s rights, including their rights to life and humane treatment.¹⁵⁸

The right to life entails among other things a right to be free “from acts and omissions that are intended or may be expected to cause their unnatural or premature death.”¹⁵⁹ It is guaranteed to all people, without distinction of any kind, including people suspected or convicted of crimes.¹⁶⁰

The case of Geraldo Lunas Campos constitutes the excessive use of force by officers acting on behalf of the US government. The evidence strongly suggests that officers deployed unnecessary and excessive force, killing Mr. Lunas Campos outside of any legal framework or protection. This constitutes an extrajudicial killing under international law. In the context of excessive use of force by immigration agents, the Inter-American Commission

¹⁵⁶ Aaron Martinez, “Autopsy: Neck Hemorrhage, Rib Fractures in ICE Death Ruled a Homicide,” USA Today, January 22, 2026 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/immigration/2026/01/21/migrants-geraldo-lunas-campos-death-at-el-paso-ice-center-ruled-a-homicide/88294285007/> (accessed April 16, 2026).

¹⁵⁷ UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), G.A. Res. 70/175, U.N. Doc. A/RES/70/75 (January 8, 2016), Rule 1, https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf (accessed March 31, 2026).

¹⁵⁸ *Hernández Rojas v. United States*, Case 14.042, Inter-Am. Comm’n H.R., Report No. 60/25, OEA/Ser.L/V/II, doc. 63 (April 28, 2025), para. 89. See also Nelson Mandela Rules, preliminary observation 3(1) (noting that Part I of the rules, including the requirement of Rule 1 that “[a]ll prisoners shall be treated with the respect due to their inherent dignity and value as human beings,” are “applicable to all categories of prisoners, criminal or civil, untried or convicted, including prisoners subject to “security measures” or corrective measures ordered by the judge”).

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 on Article 6: Right to Life, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/GC/36 (September 3, 2019), para. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 35: Article 9 (Liberty and Security of Person), U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/GC/35 (December 16, 2014).

has previously held the US government to be accountable for the killing of people in its custody.

Other instances of use of force by guards and the resulting physical injuries to detained people at Camp East Montana concern the right to security of person. The right to security of the person includes the right to life, and to physical and psychological integrity. It primarily concerns freedom from injury to the body, mind, or to bodily and mental integrity. Article 9 of the ICCPR guarantees this right to all people, without exception, including migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers, stateless persons, and people with criminal convictions.¹⁶¹

Abuses of the right to security of the person include acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Serious abuses of these rights may amount to crimes under international law. The right to personal security also requires the United States to protect people in its custody from foreseeable threats to life or bodily integrity by both governmental and private actors. It mandates that the United States prevent and redress unjustifiable use of force by law enforcement and protect against abuses by private security forces.¹⁶²

Importantly, international law prohibits any use of force that exceeds what is strictly necessary. UN standards also call for strict regulations on the use of force.

Thus, through indiscriminate beatings carried out by its agents and its failure to prevent the unjustifiable use of force at Camp East Montana, the US government violated detained people's right to security, and engaged in cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Indefinite or prolonged solitary confinement is also prohibited under international law. The Mandela Rules define prolonged solitary confinement as any period exceeding 15 consecutive days.¹⁶³ International law experts have concluded that solitary confinement for any duration beyond 15 days constitutes a form of torture.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 35, para. 9.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Nelson Mandela Rules, Rule 44.

¹⁶⁴ "United States: Prolonged Solitary Confinement Amounts to Psychological Torture, Says UN expert," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), February 28, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/02/united-states-prolonged-solitary-confinement-amounts-psychological-torture>.

Other Abusive Conditions of Detention

The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), are international standards for the humane treatment of all people in detention in accordance with human rights norms. Under these standards, detention facilities should provide adequate heating, ventilation, air, and light. They should have clean bathroom facilities in the interests of dignity and hygiene. Toilet items (including sanitary towels for women), adequate clothing, and bedding should be provided.¹⁶⁵ At Camp East Montana, the US government failed to provide adequate ventilation and air, clean bathroom facilities, toilet and sanitation items, as well as adequate clothing. Detained people described unsanitary conditions, particularly in bathrooms and showers. The government frequently failed to provide hand soap, hand sanitizer, and sometimes even toilet paper. The government also failed to adhere to a regular and reliable laundry schedule, forcing people to wear soiled clothing for up to two weeks.

People in detention should be provided with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served.¹⁶⁶ The restriction of food and water as a disciplinary sanction is inconsistent with international norms.¹⁶⁷ Detained people interviewed for this report described going hungry, facing health complications, and experiencing drastic weight loss because of restrictive eating schedules, insufficient portions, and lack of adequate nutrients. People with dietary restrictions and health conditions told us they sometimes went without food because Camp East Montana guards claimed they ran out. In some cases, people told us they believed, based on guards' demeanor and comments, that they did not receive meals on time or at all in retaliation for speaking out.

Under the Nelson Mandela Rules, all people in detention should have at least one hour of suitable exercise in the open air daily if the weather permits.¹⁶⁸ The US government did not comply with this standard; instead, it denied regular open-air recreation to detained people. In some cases, the people we interviewed told us they went up to one month without seeing

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., Rules 12-19, 42.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Rule 22.

¹⁶⁷ UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), Rule 42, https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf (accessed April 16, 2026).

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., Rule 23(1).

the sun. When they asked the guards for justification, guards said the facility did not have enough staff to take them outside. The people that we interviewed told us they believed they were not taken outside simply because guards did not feel like doing so.

The rules call on detention authorities to provide health care for prisoners and guarantee them the same standards of health care as available in the community. Necessary health care services should be given free of charge and without discrimination.¹⁶⁹ All places of detention should have a functioning health-care service that evaluates and protects the physical and mental health of detainees with particular attention to people with special health needs and issues.¹⁷⁰ During medical emergencies, detention facilities should ensure prompt access to medical attention, including transfers to specialists and civil hospitals, with decisions to transfer for specialist care and other clinical decisions taken by health care professionals and not non-medical detention staff.¹⁷¹

The Prohibition of Return to Serious Harm

Under international human rights law, the United States government is prohibited from transferring anyone, directly or indirectly, to a place where they face a risk of persecution or torture or other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment under the principle of nonrefoulement. The government's obligations stem from the Refugee Convention and Protocol,¹⁷² the Convention against Torture,¹⁷³ and the ICCPR.¹⁷⁴

The prohibition on refoulement bars direct and indirect state action that results in a person's return to exposure to these serious harms. Constructive refoulement occurs where indirect pressure is so intense that it leads a person to believe they have no

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Rule 24(1).

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., Rule 25(1).

¹⁷¹ Ibid., Rule 27.

¹⁷² Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, art. 33(1), 189 U.N.T.S. 137 (entered into force April 22, 1954). Article I of the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, January 31, 1967, 606 U.N.T.S. 267 (entered into force October 4, 1967; accession by United States November 1, 1968), applies articles 2 to 34 of the Refugee Convention "without any geographic limitation." I (The United States acceded to the Refugee Protocol on November 1, 1968).

¹⁷³ Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, art. 3(1), December 10, 1984, 1465 U.N.T.S. 85 (entered into force June 26, 1987; ratified by the United States October 21, 1994).

¹⁷⁴ ICCPR, art. 7; Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 20: Article 7 (44th sess., 1992), para. 9 ("States parties must not expose individuals to the danger of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment upon return to another country by way of their extradition, expulsion or refoulement."), in *Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies*, pp. 30-33.

practical option but to return to countries where they face serious risk of persecution, torture, or other threats to their lives or safety.

Threatening a person with violence, criminal charges, or indefinite detention if they do not agree to a “voluntary return” to a place where they face a risk of harm—such as in cases of attempted third-country deportations and expulsions documented by Human Rights Watch—constitutes constructive refoulement. Likewise, the intentional creation of hostile conditions of confinement, including the use of force, systematic denial of necessary medical care, malnutrition, incommunicado detention, and the absence of meaningful recreation, can amount to constructive refoulement insofar as it coerces people to abandon protection claims.

The Crime of Enforced Disappearance

The crime of enforced disappearance occurs when state agents, or individuals acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state, deprive a person of their liberty and then refuse to disclose the person’s fate or whereabouts.¹⁷⁵ It is a violation of the ICCPR.¹⁷⁶

Enforced disappearance simultaneously violates multiple non-derogable human rights, including the right to life, the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment, and the right to be free from arbitrary arrest and detention. Because of its gravity, no circumstances may be invoked to justify or excuse its use.¹⁷⁷

In the context of immigration detention, enforced disappearance arises when deprivation of liberty is accompanied by the denial of fundamental legal safeguards, including the

¹⁷⁵ UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, General Comment on the Definition of Enforced Disappearance, (March 2007), in Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/72 (January 10, 2008), para. 26. A similar definition appears in the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, December 20, 2006, 2716 U.N.T.S. 3 (entered into force December 23, 2010), art. 2. The United States has neither signed nor ratified this convention.

¹⁷⁶ The Human Rights Committee has observed that “while the Covenant does not explicitly use the term ‘enforced disappearance’ in any of its articles, enforced disappearance constitutes a unique and integrated series of acts that represent continuing violation of various rights recognized in that treaty.” *Dhakai v. Nepal*, Communication No. 2185/2012, para. 11.5, Human Rights Committee, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/119/D/2185/2012 (May 5, 2017).

¹⁷⁷ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, art. 1(1) (2)

ability to communicate with legal counsel, family members, or consular authorities.¹⁷⁸ There is no minimum duration required for a detention to qualify as an enforced disappearance.¹⁷⁹ Any deprivation of liberty followed by a refusal to acknowledge the detention or disclose the person's fate or whereabouts places the person outside the protection of the law.

Enforced disappearance is a continuous violation that begins at the moment of deprivation of liberty and persists until the state acknowledges the detention and provides reliable information about the person's whereabouts and legal status.¹⁸⁰ Throughout this period, both the disappeared person and their family are subjected to ongoing human rights violations.

In many cases during transfers from other detention facilities to Camp East Montana, detained people were held off the ICE locator system, denied access to legal counsel, and provided no means of contacting family members or attorneys using the facility's tablets. Detained people described intense psychological distress after being detained and transferred without knowing where they were being taken or why. Family members recounted extreme anguish as they searched ICE databases and repeatedly contacted Camp East Montana, only to be told that no information was available about their loved ones.

Families have a right to information about the arrest and detention of spouses and parents, the identity of the responsible agency, and the fate and whereabouts of their detained relatives.¹⁸¹ The family members of people subject to enforced disappearance are themselves victims of enforced disappearance, a reality consistently recognized by international human rights bodies, which have affirmed their entitlement to truth, justice, and reparations.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Committee on Enforced Disappearances, General Comment No. 1 on Enforced Disappearance in the Context of Migration, U.N. Doc. CED/C/GC/1 (October 26, 2023), para. 16.

¹⁷⁹ *Yrusta v. Argentina*, Communication No. 1/2013, Committee on Enforced Disappearances, U.N. Doc. CED/C/10/D/1/2013 (April 12, 2016), para. 10.3.

¹⁸⁰ Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, General Comment on Enforced Disappearances as a Continuous Crime, A/HRC/16/48, (26 Jan. 2011), para. 1.

¹⁸¹ Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, General Comment on the Right to the Truth in Relation to Enforced Disappearances, para. 1, in Report of the Working Group on Enforced and Arbitrary Disappearances, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/16/48, pp. 12-17.

¹⁸² Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances, General Comment on the Right to the Truth in Relation to Enforced Disappearances, para. 4.

International law requires states to take concrete measures to prevent, investigate, and punish enforced disappearances. These obligations include ensuring accountability;¹⁸³ establishing effective and accessible complaint mechanisms;¹⁸⁴ prohibiting secret detention;¹⁸⁵ and refusing to transfer people to countries where they face a real risk of enforced disappearance.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, art. 6.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 12.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, art. 17.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, art. 16.

Acknowledgments

We thank the people detained at Camp East Montana for organizing to improve conditions of confinement, connecting us to their family members, and trusting us with their experiences. The people we interviewed, and their loved ones, constantly affirmed the importance of bringing their truth to light and working to end the harms of US immigration detention and mass deportations. Without their expertise, this report would not have been possible. Our report draws upon information and guidance provided by El Paso's legal aid organizations. Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center, Estrella del Paso, and the Texas Civil Rights Project's Beyond Borders team connected us to directly impacted people, spoke candidly of the issues they encountered at Fort Bliss, and strengthened our understanding of the evolving landscape of immigration advocacy at the United States and Mexico border.

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