

Increased Incarceration; Insufficient Oversight

**An Inhumane and Broken
Immigration Detention System**



ACLU
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Increased Incarceration; Insufficient Oversight:

An Inhumane and Broken Immigration Detention System

Introduction

On the 2024 presidential election campaign trail, President Donald Trump declared he would more aggressively target immigrant communities in the United States, compared to his first term.¹ Now in his second term, after being re-elected in November 2024, President Trump's administration is decimating American communities by targeting and terrorizing immigrants with no regard for the law, the constitution, or basic human decency.

There has been a drastic increase in the number of people being held in immigration detention since the start of Trump's second term. At its highest, in January 2026, the number of people in immigration detention reached a record high of 68,990,² a significant increase from the number of people being held in detention in 2024 at the end of former President Joe Biden's administration.³

Total Population of People in ICE Detention

(AS OF JANUARY 2026)



Chart: Austin Kocher • Source: ICE • Created with Datawrapper

Despite President Trump's claims that his administration's immigration crackdown and mass deportation efforts are focusing on "dangerous immigrants,"⁴ statistics show the opposite is true.⁵ When the detention numbers were at their highest, the ICE data showed that 33,380 of the people detained by ICE did not have any criminal charges or convictions in the U.S. Nearly half of the people being held were classified as immigration violators, solely because of civil violations of U.S. immigration law. Only 26% of those in detention, or 17,729 people, had criminal convictions, and another 26%, or 17,881 people, had pending criminal charges.⁶

ICE arrested more than 3,500 people in Colorado in the nine-month period from January

Status of People in ICE Detention

(DATA FROM JANUARY 2026)

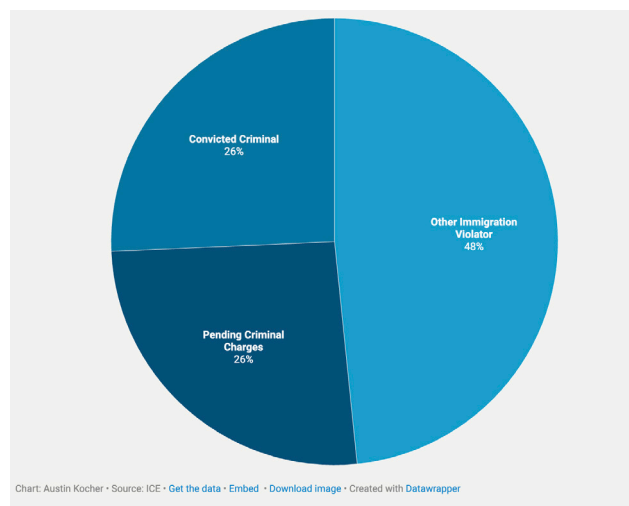


Chart: Austin Kocher • Source: ICE • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#) • Created with Datawrapper

20, 2025, to October 15, 2025, according to new data published by the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law's Deportation Data Project, and analyzed by a reporter with *The Colorado Sun*.⁷



Screenshot of Colorado Sun web article, December 2025.

The administration's mass deportation efforts are only expected to continue to surge, as tens of billions of dollars have been allocated to immigration enforcement and ICE. In June, Congress passed a bill that will fund ICE and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) through the end of President Trump's second term.⁸ DHS will receive roughly \$70 billion that will need to be spent by the end of its fiscal year 2029. According to a National Public Radio report, this is more than three times its annual budget, making it the highest funded federal law enforcement agency.⁹

This additional funding is on top of the tens of billions of dollars that was approved for the agencies in July 2025. Last summer, Congress approved \$170 billion for immigration and border enforcement, with \$75 billion going directly to ICE,¹⁰ \$45 billion of which was specifically allocated to expand immigration detention infrastructure in the U.S.¹¹ This amount is larger than the budget for the entire federal prison system and is expected to expand ICE detention capacity to 100,000

people daily.¹² According to initial reporting, this additional funding could enable ICE to double its detention capacity in the United States,¹³ including likely expansions in Colorado.¹⁴

Expanding Immigration Detention

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has always operated in secrecy, and now, under the Trump administration's second term, it has continued to make decisions in the shadows with even less oversight. We witnessed this continuing pattern with ICE's attempts to expand immigration detention after Trump took office in January 2025. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and our Colorado affiliate have only received details of ICE's plans because we've taken the federal agency to court to force them to release information.

In February 2025, ICE issued a request for information (RFI) to expand detention capacity in Colorado and Wyoming. In March 2025, the ACLU and ACLU of Colorado immediately tried to gain more information about ICE's planned expansion by submitting a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for documents pertaining to the RFI. ICE ignored that request, leading the two organizations to sue¹⁵ the agency in April to obtain records regarding its potential plans to expand immigration detention in those two western states.

As a result of the lawsuit, we received an initial batch of heavily redacted documents in July 2025 that revealed six facilities under consideration, including:¹⁶

- Hudson Correctional Facility in Hudson, Colorado.
- Huerfano County Correctional Center in Walsenburg, Colorado.
- Cheyenne Mountain Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
- The Baptiste Migrant Detention Facility in La Junta, Colorado.
- The Colorado Springs Migrant Detention Facility

- Apex Site Services, a provider of temporary structures and modular buildings, proposed a tent facility in Walsenburg, Colorado.

Notably, disclosed documents revealed that the Hudson Correctional Facility has a claimed capacity of 1,256 people with day rooms for additional bunking. The facility also owns 37 adjacent acres of land and alleges that it has already received a conditional use permit for a 1,000-bed expansion. Documents state that the facility was in “advanced talks with operators” as of February 2025. After ACLU of Colorado lawyers pushed the agency for more information, ICE provided less-redacted documents in August 2025.¹⁷

Following those additional disclosures in August about the Hudson facility, ACLU of Colorado filed another public records request later that same month for more information about ICE’s plans to expand immigrant detention in Colorado. ICE failed to comply with this records request, so ACLU of Colorado was forced to file a second public records lawsuit against ICE in September 2025.¹⁸ This second lawsuit forced ICE to release additional documents reflecting their ongoing efforts to expand detention in our state.¹⁹ As a result

of the lawsuit, ICE then released additional batches of documents in December 2025.²⁰

Through careful review and analysis of the heavily redacted records, many of which consisted mostly of internal emails and fragments of contracts, ACLU of Colorado staff attorneys were able to discern that the Hudson Correctional Facility is now being called the Big Horn Correctional Facility by ICE. The documents also confirm ICE prepared a \$39 million letter contract for the Hudson-based facility with The GEO Group, Inc. (GEO). The documents also suggested plans to ramp up the facility beginning in the fall of 2025. However, most additional details, including operation timelines and contracts, have been redacted or withheld.

The documents also included an additional contract proposal for the Southern Ute Indian Adult Detention Center, valued at less than \$100,000, that was submitted to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in August 2025. A spreadsheet from February 6, 2025, also purports to show that the Huerfano County Correctional Facility in Walsenburg, Colo. is “funded.” No additional details about the Southern Ute or Huerfano County facilities were found in the redacted documents.

ICE has only provided information when



Exterior of the GEO facility in Aurora, Colorado, August 2024.

pressed by our organization through legal action; even then, the information they provide has been so heavily redacted that it is difficult to discern any details about its expanded detention plans. Our organization is still waiting on ICE to provide information on correspondence with contractors like the Hudson facility owner Highlands REIT and the facility's proposed operator, GEO.

Right now, the Denver Contract Detention Facility in Aurora, Colorado, more widely known as the GEO facility because it is operated by GEO, is listed as the only detention center in Colorado on ICE's website.²¹ Private prison companies such as GEO, have seen profits soar since the Trump administration took office in January 2025. In their most recent earnings report for the fiscal year 2026, The GEO Group saw a 17% increase in revenue totaling \$705.2 million compared to the first quarter of its fiscal year 2025 which earned the corporation \$604.6 million.²² GEO's financial records from 2025 show increases in three of its four quarters, compared to its fiscal year 2024, prior to the Trump administration's second term.²³ For the entire fiscal year 2025, GEO reported full year total revenues of \$2.6 billion,²⁴ a slight increase compared to the full year 2024 which ended with \$2.42 billion in revenue.²⁵

Editor's note: On Monday, July 13, 2026, two days before the publishing of this report, The GEO Group, Inc. announced that DHS had awarded it a five-year contract to open the Big Horn Correctional Facility in Hudson, Colorado.²⁶

A Troubling History of Inhumane Treatment

The GEO facility in Aurora, Colorado has a long, troubling history of death, neglect, and abuse of the people detained in its for-profit prison. A 2019 ACLU of Colorado report, "Cashing in on Cruelty,"²⁷ details many of the experiences of people who have been held at

the GEO facility,²⁸ and, even more distressing, the stories of families whose loved ones who died within its walls. The report specifically sheds lights on the death of Kamyar Samimi, a legal permanent resident who had been living in the U.S. for four decades at his home in Thornton, Colorado. Samimi died two weeks after being taken to the GEO facility, after the GEO staff failed to provide adequate medical care.

The horrors experienced at the facility only continued following the publishing of that report. In October 2022, another man died while being held at the facility in Aurora. Like Samimi, Melvin Calero Mendoza received inadequate medical care before his untimely death in detention according to a wrongful death complaint filed by Novo Legal Group.

Despite these wrongful deaths, records of atrocious conditions, and reports of insufficient medical care, the GEO facility continues to operate with little oversight. This has only become more worrisome now that immigration detention rates have increased at unprecedented levels across the country since the Trump administration took office, including at the GEO facility in Colorado.

The Death of Melvin Calero Mendoza

On October 13, 2022, a 39-year-old man named Melvin Calero Mendoza died at the GEO facility in Aurora, Colorado. Calero Mendoza was a Nicaraguan man seeking a better life for his family in the U.S. and asylum from the



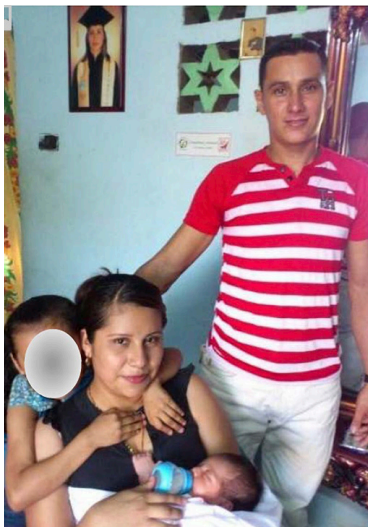
Melvin Calero Mendoza.

Photo courtesy of Novo Legal Group.

violence he witnessed in Nicaragua. His death was the most recent to occur at the GEO facility in Aurora.

According to a wrongful death complaint filed by Novo Legal Group, on behalf of Calero Mendoza's family, he died a preventable death after GEO medical staff failed to diagnose and treat a blood clot in his leg.²⁹ The complaint states that the blood clot eventually traveled in his bloodstream to his lungs and caused a pulmonary embolism, blocking blood flow to his lungs and causing his death.³⁰

According to the complaint, Calero Mendoza and his family were seeking a better life in the U.S. to escape from the dangers of Nicaragua, where they had experienced political turmoil, economic instability, and gang violence. The complaint says his plan was to reunite with his long-time partner, Dorling Peralta Rivera, who had come to the U.S. in 2020, and had been granted a work authorization while pursuing asylum. Calero Mendoza was planning to apply for asylum, like Peralta Rivera had. They later planned to bring their two young children to the U.S. to join them. Sadly, they never got the chance to carry out their plans.



Melvin Calero Mendoza with his family.

Photo courtesy of Novo Legal Group.

The complaint describes the journey Calero Mendoza took after he entered the U.S. on April 13, 2022, near El Paso, Texas.³¹ According to the complaint, he was detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in El Paso, despite

having no criminal history. He was ordered to pursue his asylum claim while in immigration detention. Initially, Calero Mendoza was sent to the Torrance County Detention Facility (TCDF) in Estancia, New Mexico. He arrived there on April 16, 2022. While at the TCDF, Calero Mendoza underwent an initial health screening by a nurse practitioner (NP), where he reported no symptoms or complaints. On May 1, 2022, ICE transferred Melvin from the TCDF to the GEO facility in Aurora, where his health began to decline, culminating in his death a few months later.

Like many families before them, Calero Mendoza's family's life was shattered after his sudden death. For more than a year, his young children and long-time partner were left without answers about the tragic loss of their loved one.

There are two public reports released by agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) following in-custody deaths: the Detainee Death Review Report (DDRR),³² released by the U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR), and the Detainee Death Report (DDR),³³ released by ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO). These reports, which were drafted after ICE's investigation into Calero Mendoza's death, were not immediately released to the public following the completion of its investigation.³⁴ For seven months, ICE declined to release its post-investigation reports.³⁵ Ultimately, Elizabeth Jordan, an immigration attorney and professor with the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law, filed a lawsuit against DHS and ICE to obtain the reports, at the request of Calero Mendoza's sister and personal representative.³⁶ They were only released after the litigation was filed a year after his death.³⁷

The reports highlight the troubling pattern of medical neglect seen with many of the in-custody deaths at for-profit facilities across the United States. According to the DDR, Calero Mendoza was only evaluated by registered nurses (RN) and licensed practical nurses (LPN) when receiving care in the facility; he was not

seen by a physician. It was only after emergency services were called, within an hour of his death, that he was seen by a University of Colorado Health physician for the first time.³⁸

The wrongful death complaint describes Calero Mendoza as being an avid soccer fan whose favorite team was FC Barcelona.³⁹ According to ICE's DDR, Calero Mendoza's health first began to decline in early August, after he had reportedly injured his foot while playing soccer.⁴⁰ According to an investigative reporter contracted by the ACLU of Colorado, who toured the facility in October 2023, the makeshift soccer field was indistinguishable from a prison yard. Barbed wire curled along the top of a chain link fence, padlocked on all sides and accessible only from within the facility; the large concrete rectangle offered no protection from the sun or elements.

According to the DDRR, after his soccer injury, Calero Mendoza had requested to be moved from a top bunk to a bottom bunk to help manage his knee pain. That request was denied; instead, Calera Mendoza was advised to fill out a "sick call request."⁴¹ He was not evaluated for his foot injury until September 1, 2022, 25 days after his injury. According to the DDRR, Calero Mendoza described his pain as "stabbing" during the initial assessment and said it was a 10 out of 10.⁴² After assessing his injured foot, an LPN sent Calero Mendoza back to his cell. Per the LPN's evaluation, it was determined that he should have 325 milligrams of acetaminophen twice a day, plus 200 milligrams of ibuprofen three times a day, for five days. They recommended that Calero Mendoza stay off his foot for 48 hours and advised him to return to the medical clinic if his condition worsened.⁴³

Eleven days later, on September 12, 2022, Calero Mendoza was reexamined by an LPN for continued foot pain. The LPN repeated the instructions to take ibuprofen, advised Calero Mendoza to apply ice and warm compresses to the injured area, and advised him to return to the medical clinic if his pain worsened. At this appointment, Calero Mendoza told the LPN that

his pain was sharp and felt like an 8 out of 10.⁴⁴

Two and a half weeks later, on September 29, 2022, Calero Mendoza returned to the medical clinic. According to his DDRR, this time he reported injuring his right calf while playing soccer two days earlier. He described his pain being at 10 out of 10.⁴⁵ The LPN determined Calero Mendoza should once again take ibuprofen, advised him to elevate his right foot and ice the affected area three to four times for 24 hours, and to resume activity gradually using ice and warm compresses for pain management.⁴⁶

The next logs in both Calero Mendoza's DDR and DDRR are dated October 13, 2022, the day he died. According to the DDRR, Calero Mendoza collapsed in his bunk area near a dayroom in the facility at 10:49 a.m. that day. He hit his head on the wall as he fell to the floor.⁴⁷ A resident advisor (RA) called a code blue, and two fellow men in detention lifted Calero Mendoza from the floor and placed him on a chair.⁴⁸ They removed their shirts and began to fan his body as they supported his head, each placing a hand on the side of Calero Mendoza's face to help him stay upright.

One minute later, an individual whose name is redacted in the report arrived and instructed the watching guards to clear all people being detained from the area, except for the two men supporting Calero Mendoza. Multiple security and medical staff arrived in the area at 10:51 a.m. and began supportive care, including giving Calero Mendoza oxygen, asking him questions, and taking his vital signs, while an RA called 911. According to the DDRR, Calero Mendoza was semi-conscious. He was able to acknowledge being asked questions but unable to answer.

The call to Falck Rocky Mountain EMS is yet another piece of evidence of the inadequate and disorganized medical care people held within the GEO facility are receiving. According to a Colorado Public Radio report, the 911 call lasted seven minutes as the guard who called struggled to give dispatchers basic information like the address of the GEO facility.⁴⁹ Near the beginning of the call, the guard gave an

incorrect address to the emergency dispatcher, only offering the correct address on the third attempt. The transcript of the 911 call was obtained by National Public Radio and given to Colorado Public Radio from a litigated FOIA request.⁵⁰ The guards and medical staff that tended to Calero Mendoza had not provided any clear information to the RA who called 911 — information like the gravity of Calero Mendoza's distress, his age, or his location within the facility.

At 10:58 a.m., Calero Mendoza was moved to a gurney and wheeled to the intake area to await ambulance transport to UC Health.⁵¹ While awaiting transport, Calero Mendoza became responsive and was able to indicate to the LPNs and RNs that he was feeling pain. When an RN asked Calero Mendoza where he was feeling pain, he motioned to the upper central part of his abdomen and said in Spanish, "I feel like I'm going to die," according to the DDDR. By 12:32 p.m. on October 13, 2022, Calero Mendoza was dead.⁵²

According to ICE's National Detention Standards updated in 2026, the GEO facility is expected to "develop written plans and procedures for handling emergency situations reasonably likely to occur... All staff will be trained in the emergency plans, which will be reviewed and updated as appropriate on an annual basis."⁵³ However, the DDR, DDDR, and the 911 transcript indicate that the GEO facility is not equipped to facilitate critical care during medical emergencies at the facility.

Performance Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) have been developed by outside agencies to standardize minimum care expectations for people in detention.⁵⁴ These standards discuss in broad strokes the type of care provided to people in detention. Whatever plans or procedures have been implemented to date at the GEO facility, they have not been sufficient to prevent medical negligence.

Connections Between Recent In-Custody Deaths at the GEO Facility

One of the most troubling aspects of Calero Mendoza's death is that it came on the heels of the death of another man in detention who, like Calero Mendoza, was not provided adequate medical care. Kamyar Samimi died while in custody of ICE in Aurora in 2017. Samimi's Detainee Death Review (DDR) notes multiple areas of failure.⁵⁵ But perhaps the most concerning is that, like Calero Mendoza, Samimi was not examined by a medical doctor until within an hour of his death, after he had been transferred to a hospital.⁵⁶

According to Samimi's DDR, Samimi had been held in a medical unit for 16 days prior to his death — but was only examined three times.⁵⁷ The DDR details the progressive deterioration of Samimi's health and notes the significant failures of the nursing staff, including nurses failing to administer physician-ordered withdrawal medication, medical staff failing to conduct the proper intake medical assessments, and medical staff failing to transfer Samimi to the ER after exhibiting life-threatening withdrawal symptoms in the week after his intake, among many other failures.⁵⁸

Fighting for Transparency and Oversight

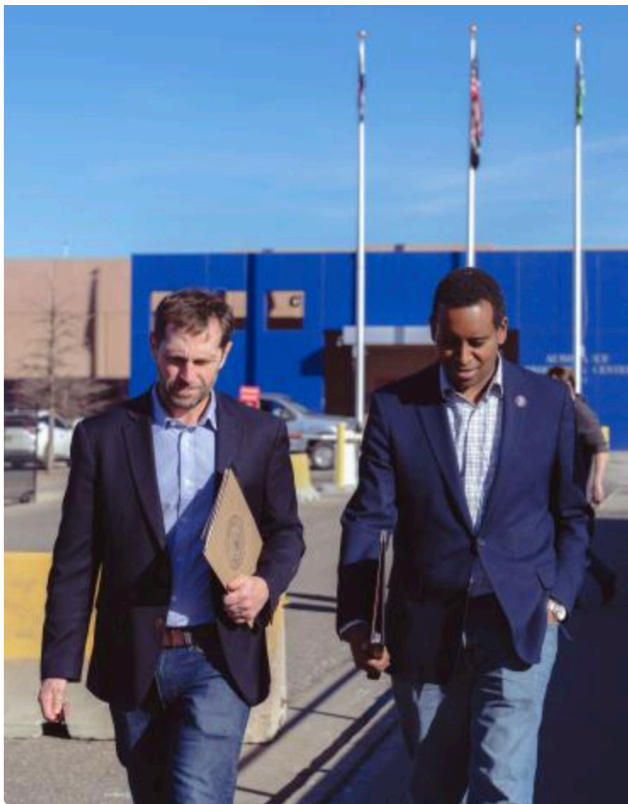
There are very few binding standards related to the medical care of people being held in for-profit detention. Of the standards that do exist, implementation and compliance remain challenging at best.

In Colorado, 6th Congressional District Representative Jason Crow is working to increase transparency and implement life-saving oversight. The city of Aurora is located within the district that Rep. Crow's represents. Rep. Crow attempted to tour the facility in 2019 after receiving disturbing reports concerning medical care at the detention center. Newly elected to Congress at that time, Rep. Crow

was turned away at the door. This prompted the Congressman to create the Public Oversight of Detention Centers (POD) Act, which requires private detention centers to permit members of Congress to enter a facility with no notice. Bill language protecting this right to unannounced oversight has been included in annual appropriations law since 2020.

After the law was created, Rep. Crow's office began conducting facility oversight through facility visits and reporting. However, since the Trump administration took office for the second time, conducting this reporting has become much more challenging.

Since the POD Act was passed in 2020, Rep. Crow's office had routinely used electronic information requests to develop accountability reports, but, according to Rep. Crow's office, Rep. Crow was notified by the Trump administration in February 2025 that ICE would no longer respond to regular oversight electronic information requests.⁵⁹



U.S. Representatives Jason Crow (left) and Joe Neguse (right) outside the Aurora GEO Detention Facility, February 6, 2026. Photo Courtesy of Representative Jason Crow's Office Website.

In March 2025, the Trump Administration created even more roadblocks for Rep. Crow's office when it informed the office that ICE would no longer provide electronic files and written updates relevant to the completion of Rep. Crow's accountability reports detailing conditions at this facility.⁶⁰

On July 20, 2025, Rep. Crow attempted to visit the GEO facility but was denied entrance to the detention center in violation of federal law.⁶¹ Ten days later, Rep. Crow's office filed a lawsuit against the Trump administration, challenging the administration's attempts to block members of Congress from doing unannounced oversight visits at federal immigration detention centers.⁶² Twelve other members of Congress joined Rep. Crow as plaintiffs in the case after they were also denied access to federal immigration detention facilities in their respective districts. In February 2026, a judge granted emergency relief in this lawsuit, restoring Congress member's rights to conduct unannounced oversight visits.⁶³

But the Trump administration's efforts to block oversight continued. In September 2025, Rep. Crow's office was informed that ICE staff would no longer verbally provide information requested by congressional staff during oversight visits.⁶⁴ Congressional staff were instead directed to submit requests for information to the ICE Office of Congressional Relations (OCR). Staff within Rep. Crow's office say those requests are not being fulfilled until months after the request is submitted and are sometimes going unanswered entirely. The last response the Congressman's office received from ICE OCR was in December 2025. However, according to his office, his staff continues to request electronic information from ICE OCR after each oversight visit.

Due to these changes, the number of accountability reports posted by Rep. Crow's office has decreased compared to the number that was posted during the Biden administration or during President Trump's first term. The reports that Rep. Crow's office publish are limited to what he or his staff

observe when conducting the few in-person oversight visits that have not been denied, during tours where ICE and GEO staff working in the facility are required to remain silent.⁶⁵ Because of the limited information provided to the Congressman and his office, many reports are now marked as “Report will be updated when ICE responds to an outstanding written request for information,” or with “Oversight visit denied.”⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Rep. Crow’s office says it remains committed to providing proper congressional oversight of for-profit detention centers. His office staff says it will continue to make good-faith efforts to visit the GEO facility and attempt to obtain verbal updates from ICE. “Last year was the deadliest year in decades for people in ICE custody. It’s completely unacceptable and another tragic reason for the need for oversight and accountability. It’s why I fought for the law mandating unannounced oversight visits of for-profit immigration detention facilities, why my staff and I have conducted more than 100 oversight visits at GEO in Aurora, and why I ultimately believe we need an end to for-profit immigration detention facilities,” said Rep. Crow. “Until then, I won’t be intimidated from doing my job. I’ll continue these regular oversight visits to ensure the law is being followed, and people are being treated with dignity and respect.”

Looking at Rep. Crow’s office most recent accountability report from March 10, 2026, much of the information that would typically be included is instead marked as “information requested, not available.”⁶⁷ Some facts have been documented. When Rep. Crow’s office conducted the unannounced oversight visit, 1,249 people were detained in the facility (The GEO facility has a maximum capacity of 1,532 people.⁶⁸) The report also noted that a housing unit at the facility that had previously been used for restricted housing was now being repurposed for general population use by installing permanent telephones.⁶⁹ According to the report, this “pod” can hold up to 90 people.⁷⁰

At the time of the visit detailed in the most

recent report, Rep. Crow’s office said GEO staff provided only limited responses to questions, including questions about whether the medical department was fully staffed. Subsequent information requests made by Rep. Crow’s staff found that medical staff included only one medical doctor, two physicians’ assistants (PAs), and 18 registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs).⁷¹ At the time of the visit, GEO medical staff said there were no communicable diseases in the facility, but they declined to answer whether there had been any medical emergencies needing transport at the facility in recent weeks. Rep. Crow’s office filed a written request for additional information with ICE on March 11, 2026.⁷² That request is still pending.

Conclusion

Federal officials and agencies are using our federal tax dollars to fund, support, and defend an inhumane immigration detention system. During his second term, the Trump administration has put an obscene amount of funding into its unlawful, immigration enforcement efforts and has created new policies that make the oversight of immigration detention centers even more challenging for Congressional lawmakers who are trying to hold detention center operators accountable.

Despite these challenges, civil rights and immigrants’ rights organizations are fighting tooth and nail to ensure that our vulnerable immigrant communities are being defended and protected. As of June 2026, the ACLU of Colorado is working on eight different lawsuits related to immigrants’ rights; seven have been filed against either DHS, ICE, or the Trump administration. Our organization will continue to lean on court challenges as an avenue to protect, defend, and advance the civil rights of our community immigrant members.

ACLU of Colorado advocacy department staff have also been working in the field with volunteers, partner organizations, and

supporters to organize against the proposed immigration detention expansion in Colorado. Our organization has also participated in and co-organized protests against the immigration detention center opening in Hudson, Colorado.

Recent research shows the majority of Americans do not agree with how the Trump administration and ICE are handling immigration enforcement in the U.S.⁷³ According to the survey conducted by PBS News, NPR, and Marist Poll in February 2026, 65% of Americans believe ICE has gone too far.⁷⁴ Many Coloradans who disagree with the federal government's overreach and abuses of power testified during the 2026 Colorado Legislative Session in support of proposed legislation called the No Kings Act, a bill that would have allowed people to sue federal officials acting under color of law for federal constitutional rights violations. Unfortunately, the No Kings Act was postponed indefinitely by the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The ACLU of Colorado advocated in support of the No Kings Act, and despite it failing to become law this year, we will not stop fighting at the capitol for critical legislation that will protect, advance, or defend the civil rights and liberties of people in Colorado.

Our organization is committed to using all avenues available to aid in our mission to advocate for our immigrant neighbors, and other members of disenfranchised communities in our state.

Acknowledgements

American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado would like to thank the people and organizations that brought this report to life.

First and foremost, current ACLU of Colorado clients for their bravery in sharing their experiences while detained at the GEO facility in Aurora, Colorado, to support litigation that aims to prevent others like them from suffering like they did, their family members who were directly impacted by the sudden and wrongful detention of their loved ones, and their

communities for the support they have offered to these individuals and their families.

To those who have suffered behind bars at the GEO facility, and to those who continue to wait for justice: we see you, we support you, and we will continue to fight for your rights in the courts, at the capitol, and in community in effort to protect the vulnerable communities who are suffering at the hands of the federal government and ICE.

ACLU of Colorado Communications Director, Erica Kobek, provided research, writing, and copyediting of this report. Kobek also managed the production, publishing, and public release of this report. This report was principally investigated, and partly written by Erika Snyder, an investigative reporter contracted by the ACLU of Colorado. This report was edited by ACLU of Colorado Executive Director, Olivia Mendoza, ACLU of Colorado Deputy Director, Vanessa Michel, and Astra Lincoln, a contractor hired by the ACLU of Colorado. This report was reviewed by Naureen Shah, Director of Government Affairs, Equality Division at the American Civil Liberties Union.

The ACLU of Colorado legal team consisting of ACLU of Colorado Legal Director Tim Macdonald, Managing Attorney Sara Neel, Senior Staff Attorneys Annie Kurtz, Emma Mclean-Riggs, and Scott Medlock, and Paralegal Kara Narberes, has investigated the actions of federal and ICE agents in Colorado and at the GEO facility for current ACLU of Colorado litigation involving unconstitutional ICE policies, warrantless arrests, and noncompliance with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

ACLU of Colorado Lead Researcher, Kassandra Rendon-Morales, and ACLU of Colorado, Digital Media Officer, Ivan Popov, provided research support and translation services to this report.

We are deeply grateful for the support of our community partners: American Friends Service Committee (AFSC); Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN); Colorado Immigration Rights Coalition (CIRC);

the American Immigration Lawyers Association; Elizabeth Jordan, immigration attorney with the DU Sturm College of Law; the VERA Institute for Justice; Casa de Paz; Housekeys Action Network Denver (HAND); Aurora Unidos CSO; and U.S. Representative Jason Crow and his team. Collectively, their work continues to shine light on the injustices people are facing when detained in the GEO facility in Aurora, and they continue to fight for the rights of the people held there.

To our partners: your work to uplift our immigrant communities throughout the state of Colorado is invaluable and needed now more than ever.

We would like to specially acknowledge key partners in the production of this report, including attorneys Aaron Slade, Danielle Jefferis, and Luis Cortes Romero of Novo Legal Group. Their work to support the family of Melvin Calero Mendoza has not only helped the family get more answers regarding the untimely death of their loved one but will hopefully help them get justice for Calero Mendoza.

This report is dedicated to all those who have faced injustices within the GEO facility in Aurora, with special dedication to Melvin Calero Mendoza and his family.

May you rest in power.

Methodology

In August 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado (ACLU of Colorado) contracted an independent investigative reporter to conduct research into the Denver Contract Detention Facility, locally known as the GEO facility, in Aurora, Colorado. The 11-month investigation was done following the death of Melvin Calero Mendoza at the GEO facility in October 2022, and the ACLU of Colorado's 2019 report, "Cashing in on Cruelty," which investigated allegations of mistreatment, medical neglect, and multiple deaths at the GEO facility prior to the most recent death of Calero Mendoza.

From August 2023 to July 2024, the investigative reporter, occasionally with assistance from members of the ACLU of Colorado staff, conducted interviews with members of Colorado's congressional delegation, including Representatives Jason Crow, the reporter joined a stakeholder visit, conducted by ACLU of Colorado legal staff, at the GEO facility on October 18, 2023, and researched and analyzed local and national news reports regarding immigration detention in the United States and in Colorado. The independent investigative reporter began



Exterior of the GEO facility in Aurora, Colorado, August 2024.

interviewing community partners including but not limited to the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network (RMIAN), Colorado Immigration Rights Coalition (CIRC), and Casa de Paz.

The ACLU of Colorado did an extensive review of two U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reports related to the death of Melvin Calero Mendoza on October 13, 2022. The Detainee Death Review Report (DDRR) was conducted by the DHS U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Office of Professional Responsibility and made publicly available. The Detainee Death Report (DDR) was conducted by the DHS ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) and made publicly available. The ICE ERO includes numerous divisions and field offices including Custody Management, which provides policy and oversight of those in ICE custody and manages ICE detention operations.⁷⁵

From July 2024 to January 2025, and again from December 2025 to March 2026, following a one year interruption in the report's production, ACLU of Colorado staff and independent contractors provided additional research and fact-checking using internet-based resources and/or publications provided by reputable sources including but not limited to the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the VERA Institute for Justice, the Department of Justice (DOJ), Colorado Public Radio (CPR), Colorado People's Alliance (COPA), ACLU National, Novo Legal Group, The Meyer Law Office, Just Futures Law, Denver Justice Project, Denver Justice and Peace Committee (DJPC).

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