

CHARLES E. GRASSLEY, IOWA, CHAIRMAN

LINDSEY O. GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA
JOHN CORNYN, TEXAS
MICHAEL S. LEE, UTAH
TED CRUZ, TEXAS
JOSH HAWLEY, MISSOURI
THOM TILLIS, NORTH CAROLINA
JOHN KENNEDY, LOUISIANA
MARSHA BLACKBURN, TENNESSEE
ERIC SCHMITT, MISSOURI
KATIE BOYD BRITT, ALABAMA
ASHLEY MOODY, FLORIDA

RICHARD J. DURBIN, ILLINOIS
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND
AMY KLOBUCHAR, MINNESOTA
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT
MAZIE K. HIRONO, HAWAII
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY
ALEX PADILLA, CALIFORNIA
PETER WELCH, VERMONT
ADAM B. SCHIFF, CALIFORNIA

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

June 18, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20528

Mr. David Venturella
Acting Director-Designate
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Secretary Mullin and Mr. Venturella:

We write to express deep alarm over the announcement of the 50th death in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody over the course of this administration.¹ On June 4, 2026, at Winn Correctional Center in Louisiana, Georgian immigrant Mamuka Artmeladze died at the age of 43.² He had been in ICE custody since February. His death was the second reported death at Winn in less than two months, the 19th reported ICE custody death this year, and the 50th reported ICE custody death since President Trump returned to office.

This is a staggering and unacceptable death toll for a civil detention system. In 2025, there were 31 detainee deaths—the highest number since 2004. As of June 4, 2026, 19 people had died in ICE custody this calendar year—an average of one death every 8.2 days. If that pace continues, ICE is on track for approximately 45 deaths in custody by the end of 2026. That is more than four times the number of deaths that occurred in ICE custody in 2024.

¹ According to ICE's Detainee Death Reporting, 51 foreign nationals have died in ICE custody since January 20, 2025. "Detainee Death Reporting," Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detainee-death-reporting>. Mr. Artmeladze's report has not yet been added to the Detainee Death Reporting, bringing the total to 52. "ICE detainee passes away in Louisiana," Immigration and Customs Enforcement, June 7, 2026, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-detainee-passes-away-louisiana-0>. Two of the foreign nationals listed in the Detainee Death Reporting, Norlan Guzman-Fuentes and Miguel Angel Garcia-Hernandez, were killed when an active shooter entered the ICE field office on September 24, 2025. "Detainee Death Report: GARCIA Hernandez, Miguel Angel," ICE, <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/reports/ddrGARCIAHernandezMiguelAngel.pdf>; "Detainee Death Report: GUZMAN Fuentes, Norlan," ICE, <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/reports/ddrGUZMANFuentesNorlan.pdf>. Thus, excluding the two detainees killed or fatally wounded in the Dallas ICE field-office shooting, the total deaths in detention during the second Trump administration thus far is 50.

² "ICE detainee passes away in Louisiana," Immigration and Customs Enforcement, June 7, 2026, <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-detainee-passes-away-louisiana-0>.

The deaths of Mr. Artmeladze and the 49 others who have died in ICE custody must be understood in the context of this administration's deliberate policy choices. DHS has aggressively expanded the use of detention, sought to subject broad categories of undocumented immigrants to mandatory detention without individualized bond hearings, and continued to defend that policy even after losing in federal court more than 13,000 times.³ With more people in detention for longer periods of time, this has predictably placed more pressure on a system already plagued by medical neglect and dangerous conditions. Your administration either failed to account for this predictable result or proceeded despite it.

The dangers are extending to people who should not be swept up in prolonged detention in the first place. One family, including five children, was held for more than 10 months before being freed under a federal judge's order.⁴ In another case, a woman who was allegedly trafficked to the United States and had pending applications for asylum and for a visa for victims of trafficking, was placed in ICE detention and held for four months until a federal judge ordered her release.⁵ Carlos Ventura Martinez, a Maryland father of three with no criminal record, was detained as a collateral arrest while ICE was looking for someone else, held for months despite an immigration judge finding he was neither a danger nor a flight risk, and released only after a federal court intervened.⁶ These are not the "worst of the worst." These are victims of an illegal policy to detain first and ask questions later, which has clogged our federal courts.⁷

Records from Winn Correctional Center and other detention facilities demonstrate just how dire this crisis has become. Recent federal oversight found serious violations at Winn involving improper food safety protocols, facility disrepair, poor medical documentation, and prohibited use-of-force incidents.⁸ Despite awareness of these problems, DHS kept people detained there and now two people have died in less than two months.

³ Kyle Cheney, et al., "Explore the data: More than 13,600 rulings against Trump in ICE cases," *Politico*, June 16, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/05/13/mandatory-detention-ice-cases-rulings-database-00913988>.

⁴ Neena Satija, et al., "In the nation's only ICE family detention center, one family has been locked up for 10 months," *The Houston Chronicle*, April 17, 2026, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/ice-detention-trump-tactics-elgamal-family-22082087.php>; Jose Olivares, "Family of six held by ICE arrives back in Colorado as lawyer attacks 'kidnapping'," *The Guardian*, March 25, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/may/02/family-ice-detention-colorado>.

⁵ Milli Legrain, "Mother was allegedly trafficked to US and illegally detained by ICE while abuser is free, lawyers say," *The Guardian*, March 25, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/mar/25/mother-trafficking-ice-detained>; "Jenner & Block Secures Release of Trafficking Survivor Unlawfully Detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement," Jenner & Block, April 20, 2026, <https://www.jenner.com/en/news-insights/news/jenner-and-block-secures-release-of-trafficking-survivor-unlawfully-detained-by-immigration-and-customs-enforcement>.

⁶ "Ventura Martinez v. Trump: Stopping the expansion of mandatory detention," Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center, <https://kennedyhumanrights.org/litigation/ventura-martinez-v-trump-stopping-the-expansion-of-mandatory-detention/>.

⁷ Sudhin Thanawala, "Trump's immigration crackdown is straining federal courts. Judges are raising the alarm," *Associate Press*, Feb. 9, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-immigration-bond-habeas-courts-d1d1fa9b16365577651ef958a0ec342f>.

⁸ "Results of an Unannounced Inspection of Winn Correctional Center in Winnfield, Louisiana," U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, June 8, 2026, <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2026-06/OIG-26-08-Jun26.pdf>.

The recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on ICE’s Camp East Montana facility at Fort Bliss—where at least three detainees have died—exposes the consequences of this administration’s reckless rush to expand detention.⁹ GAO found that ICE and the U.S. Army fast-tracked a contract worth up to \$1.3 billion for what became ICE’s largest detention facility, selected a contractor without prior detention-services experience, and began holding people before ICE conducted the required pre-occupancy inspection or ensured the facility met detention standards.¹⁰ Predictably, GAO found serious problems, including unsanitary dormitories, a loaded firearm lost inside the facility, an escape, a suicide after known risk factors were not properly addressed, a death by use of force later ruled a homicide—the evidence for which was later destroyed or went missing, and other serious medical failures, including no treatment plans for detained people with diabetes or HIV.¹¹ GAO also found millions of dollars in waste, including payments for meals and services ICE did not need.¹² This administration is expanding detention faster than it can safely, lawfully, or responsibly manage it.

At the very moment DHS is increasing detention and deaths are rising as a result, the department has handicapped the offices designed to expose and prevent these failures. The administration gutted the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL); by May 2025, 144 of 147 CRCL staff had been laid off.¹³ The Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman has been demolished; by December 2025 it had only three full-time employees, down from 118, and has recently been shuttered entirely.¹⁴ Meanwhile the DHS Office of Inspector General has struggled to investigate this administration, alleging systematic obstruction of oversight.¹⁵ Thus each of the watchdogs charged with identifying abuse, neglect, and systemic failure have been stripped of the staff, authority, and resources needed to oversee this historic and reckless expansion of detention.

Even worse, ICE has now ended the policy requiring the agency to report and review deaths that occur within 30 days of release from custody.¹⁶ This policy was created because ICE has a

⁹ “Immigration Detention: Waste and Performance Issues at Camp East Montana Provide Valuable Lessons for Future Facilities,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, June 9, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108886>; Michael Biesecker, et al., “Largest ICE detention facility wasted millions and put detainees at risk, report finds,” *Associated Press*, June 9, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/ice-immigration-crackdown-texas-camp-montana-report-04bc547c02e7241fc73541a4d0ba26ad>.

¹⁰ “Immigration Detention: Waste and Performance Issues at Camp East Montana Provide Valuable Lessons for Future Facilities,” U.S. Government Accountability Office, June 9, 2026, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108886>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Adam Isacson, Juan Cueller Torres Sr., et al., “Denouncing into the Void: The Dismantling of Internal Oversight and Accountability at DHS,” *WOLA*, March 19, 2026, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/denouncing-into-the-void-the-dismantling-of-internal-oversight-and-accountability-at-dhs/>.

¹⁴ *Id.*; Ximena Bustillo, “DHS blames funding lapse for shutdown of internal detention oversight,” *NPR*, May 7, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/05/07/g-s1-120834/trump-immigration-detention-ombudsman-shutdown>.

¹⁵ Eric Bazail-Eimil, “Internal DHS watchdog: Noem is obstructing our work,” *Politico*, March 3, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/03/dhs-noem-obstruction-00810919>.

¹⁶ Douglas MacMillan, “ICE to stop reporting deaths of newly released detainees, internal memo says,” *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/06/04/ice-stop-reporting-deaths-newly-released-detainees-internal-memo-says/>.

documented history of releasing gravely ill people shortly before death. Ending this reporting requirement is a blatant attempt to improve the agency's numbers. It allows ICE to narrow the public record while people continue to die from conditions that may have developed or worsened in federal custody.

The administration has repeatedly tried to minimize these deaths by comparing ICE custody to criminal custody.¹⁷ However, ICE detention is not criminal punishment and should not be punitive. People in ICE custody are held for civil immigration purposes, not because they have been convicted of, charged with, or have pending criminal charges. Courts have long recognized that people held in civil custody are entitled to more considerate treatment and conditions than people confined as punishment for a crime, and that civil detention conditions that mirror or exceed the restrictions of criminal custody may be evidence that the system has crossed the line into punishment.¹⁸ Any restriction on liberty in civil detention must be tied to a legitimate, nonpunitive purpose.

ICE custody should provide safer, less restrictive, and more normalized conditions than prisons and jails, including adequate medical and mental health care, safe and sanitary houses, limits on force and segregation, outdoor recreation, and restrictions no broader than necessary to serve a legitimate civil detention purpose. That standard underscores why this administration's sweeping mandatory detention policy is so lawless. A legitimate civil detention purpose requires some relationship between confinement and an actual need, such as flight risk, danger to public safety, or the lawful execution of removal.¹⁹ It does not permit DHS to detain broad categories of people simply because the administration wants to maximize detention numbers or encourage those in detention to self-deport.

We are also deeply concerned that this crisis is unfolding alongside escalating concerns about corruption, self-dealing, and the private prison industry's influence over immigration detention policy. Acting Director Venturella's long history with GEO Group, ICE's largest private detention contractors and the same firm for which the President's Border Czar Tom Homan consulted, raises obvious and serious conflict-of-interest concerns.²⁰ GEO Group and other private prison companies have profited enormously from this administration's mass deportation agenda, and stand to profit even more as ICE expands capacity.²¹ When these companies benefit directly from the administration's decision to detain more people for longer periods, these

¹⁷ See e.g., Daniella Silva, *Death Rate in Immigration Detention Has Reached a 22-Year-High, Raising Physicians' Concerns*, NBC NEWS (Apr. 16, 2026), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/death-rate-immigration-detention-reached-22-year-high-doctors-say-rcna331913>.

¹⁸ See *Youngberg v. Romeo*, 457 U.S. 307, 321–22 (1982); *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 535–40 (1979); *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 690–91 (2001); *Jones v. Blanas*, 393 F.3d 918, 932–35 (9th Cir. 2004).

¹⁹ See *Zadvydas v. Davis*, 533 U.S. 678, 690–91 (2001).

²⁰ Meg Anderson, "A former GEO Group executive now runs ICE. The company's government ties run deep," *NPR*, June 4, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/06/03/nx-s1-5836625/geo-group-private-prisons-ice-close-ties>; "The GEO Group, Inc.," *USAspending.gov*, <https://www.usaspending.gov/recipient/9b308edb-a62c-659b-704b-ef4e5cf3f795-C/latest>; Nick Schwellenbach, Luisa Clausen, et al., "ICE, Inc.: The Top Companies Profiting from Trump's Immigration Crackdown," *POGO Investigates*, Feb. 17, 2026, <https://www.pogo.org/investigates/ice-inc-the-top-companies-profiting-from-trumps-immigration-crackdown>; Douglas MacMillan, et al., "Trump's border czar earned consulting fees from immigrant detention firm," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/05/27/border-czar-ethics-consulting-fees/>.

closeknit relationships call into question the administration's motivations behind pursuing the broadest possible interpretation of mandatory detention.

The public deserves to know whether detention decisions are being driven by public safety and lawful immigration enforcement—or by political pressure, bed quotas, contractor influence, and private profit.

Given these significant concerns, we demand DHS and ICE pause any expansion, reopening, new population increases, or contract modifications at facilities with recent deaths, failed inspections, open corrective action plans, or unresolved medical deficiencies until DHS provides Congress with evidence that corrective actions have been completed and verified. In addition, we request that you provide the following documents and information by June 30, 2026:

1. For each death, all death reviews, mortality reviews, serious incident reports, medical records summaries, contractor reports, facility reports, Office of Professional Responsibility reviews, Office of Detention Oversight reviews, and communications with DHS or ICE headquarters.
2. All records related to the detention and death of Mamuka Artmeladze, including intake records, medical and mental health screening records, sick-call requests, medication records, housing assignments, incident reports, video footage, staff statements, contractor communications, emergency response records, hospital transfer records, and all communications with Winn Correctional Center, LaSalle Corrections, medical contractors, and DHS and ICE headquarters.
3. All records related to the detention and death of Alejandro Cabrera Clemente at Winn Correctional Center, including intake records, medical and mental health screening records, sick-call requests, medication records, housing assignments, incident reports, video footage, staff statements, contractor communications, emergency response records, hospital transfer records, and all communications with Winn Correctional Center, LaSalle Corrections, medical contractors, and DHS and ICE headquarters. Also include any corrective actions ordered, implemented, rejected, delayed, or left unresolved before Mr. Artmeladze's death.
4. All documents explaining how DHS will identify, track, or investigate cases in which a person's death after release may have been caused or worsened by medical neglect, delayed treatment, interrupted medication, untreated infection, suicide risk, or other conditions arising during ICE custody.

²¹ Lauren-Brooke Eisen, "Private Prison Companies' Enormous Windfall: Who Stands to Gain as ICE Expands," *Brennan Center for Justice*, Oct. 1, 2025, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/private-prison-companies-enormous-windfall-who-stands-gain-ice-expands>; Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, "ICE's Warehouse Purchases Herald New Model for Immigration Detention," *American Immigration Council*, Feb. 24, 2026, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-buys-warehouses-immigration-detention/>.

5. The number of people currently in ICE custody broken down by facility, criminal conviction history, bond eligibility status, length of detention, nationality, age, and medical or mental health conditions.
6. All inspection reports, corrective action plans, deficiency notices, contract monitoring reports, and communications related to conditions at Winn Correctional Center, Delaney Hall, Krome North Service Processing Center, Adelanto ICE Processing Center, Camp East Montana, and any other facility where a death has occurred since January 20, 2025.
7. All records related to the reduction, closure, suspension, or winding down of the Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman, including any analysis of how those actions would affect death reviews, medical care complaints, facility inspection, detained-person complaints, congressional oversight, and public transparency.
8. Any analysis completed by DHS or ICE of how ending the 30-day policy would affect public reporting, congressional oversight, mortality statistics, or accountability for medical neglect.

In addition, please provide written answers to the following questions:

1. What would be an acceptable number of deaths in ICE detention facilities?
2. What are scenarios in which you think it is acceptable that an individual die in ICE custody?
3. Does DHS stand by the claim that deaths in ICE custody are “exceedingly rare” after 50 people have died in ICE custody over the course of this administration?
4. Does DHS believe it has any responsibility to investigate or report deaths that occur shortly after release when the individual’s fatal condition may have developed, worsened, or gone untreated in ICE custody?
5. How many people who died in ICE custody since January 20, 2025 had no criminal conviction?
6. How many people currently detained by ICE have been ordered released or granted bond by a federal court or immigration judge but remain in custody?
7. What specific actions has DHS taken to ensure that private detention contractors do not profit from understaffing, inadequate medical care, delayed hospital transfers, or other failures to meet agreed upon service levels? Can you demonstrate to us that private contractors aren’t taking taxpayer money without robustly fulfilling their contracts?

8. Has Acting Director Venturella recused himself from any matter involving GEO Group, its subsidiaries, or private detention contracting? If not, why not?
9. Will DHS commit to restoring full staffing and function to CRCL and OIDO? If not, how does DHS intend to provide meaningful oversight of a detention system that has already seen more than 50 deaths under this administration?

The American people deserve an immigration system free of corruption, that is lawful, orderly, humane, and accountable. The record number of deaths in detention under this administration demand more than press statements, notices, and assurances that the system is functioning as intended. Congress and the public are entitled to know whether these facilities are safe, whether medical care is adequate, whether contractors are meeting their obligations, and whether DHS is taking meaningful action when people die on its watch.

We urge your administration to provide the requested information promptly.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Border
Security and Immigration



Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member