

Human Rights First

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/press-release/human-rights-first-tours-new-jersey-immigration-detention-facilities>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Work With Asylum Seekers

If you are seeking asylum, we can help

Areas of Focus

Current Initiatives

New York City Following tours this week of three immigration detention facilities in New Jersey, Human Rights First calls on the Trump Administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the local governments to improve conditions and access to health care, and to ensure due process for all detained immigrants, including through fair release processes. Together Elizabeth Contract Detention Facility, the Essex County Correctional Facility, and the Hudson County Correctional Facility hold roughly 1,700 immigrants, including a substantial number of asylum seekers.

Many asylum seekers and other vulnerable immigrants are suffering in prolonged detention in New Jersey and across the country, said Human Rights First's Eleni Bakst, who led a team of legal and health professionals on these tours. Over the past three days, our team heard countless complaints of denial of medical and mental health care, improper hygiene, racism and discrimination from facility staff, and denial of due process. These policies and conditions violate U.S. legal obligations under human rights and refugee protection treaties. This inhumane treatment results in long-term damage both to the individuals subjected to it and to the integrity of our immigration system.

The Trump Administration uses immigration detention as part of a policy designed to deter individuals from coming to the United States. Detention creates many obstacles for asylum seekers and migrants, including lack of access to counsel and difficulties gathering evidentiary documents for their cases. Detainees also reported an insufficient number of attorney visiting rooms in Essex County Correctional Facility, which sometimes leave attorneys meeting with clients in the hallway.

The use of prolonged immigration detention has expanded under the Trump Administration, with asylum seekers often held in facilities for months. In a 2017 executive order the president directed the Department of Homeland Security to hold immigrants in detention for the length of their court proceedings and to terminate procedures that allow release of individuals who satisfy certain criteria, which President Trump misleadingly characterizes as catch and release.

Additionally, the prison-like conditions of confinement and the lack of adequate medical and/or mental health care in these facilities often lead to severe suffering, avoidable deaths, and withdrawal of legitimate claims for protection. Additionally, involuntary confinement has been proven to exacerbate the symptoms of trauma and mental health disorders. Human Rights First's findings on the conditions and care were consistent with the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General's recent report, which identified systemic problems that endanger the wellbeing and safety of individuals detained in immigration detention facilities.

Prison-like conditions and inadequate medical and mental health care were evident in the three New Jersey facilities we visited this week, observed Bakst.

Eric, a man who has been detained in a New Jersey detention facility for over seven months, suffers from a genetic disorder that affects the body's connective tissue. Due to a history of cardiac problems and surgery, he was referred to an outside cardiologist, who ordered further testing and scans. According to Eric, however, the facility doctor said that while his health condition made him a ticking time bomb, ICE would not approve these additional procedures. This example aligns with the admission of ICE official that the decision of whether to provide medical care is a cost-benefit analysis.

In the facilities visited this week, multiple individuals who have been detained upwards of one year. Not only is this prolonged detention harmful to their wellbeing, it is also exceedingly expensive and often unnecessary. Data indicates that appearance rates in court for adults released from immigration detention have increased significantly in recent years. Additionally, alternatives to detention programs are widely available and even intensive programs are significantly less expensive than detention. Human Rights First has also documented reports from pro bono lawyers and asylum seekers that ICE denies parole to individuals who satisfy the requisite criteria.

Local, state, and federal governments must implement wide-ranging reforms in the immigration detention system, or they will continue to exacerbate the trauma of migrants and asylum seekers, noted Bakst.

Published on February 9, 2018

Share

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

2017 Pro Bono Stars: Houston

Blog

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

Joint Letter to President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas & AG Garland on Title 42

Letter

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

360 Videos Document Life for Asylum Seekers at U.S. Border

Press

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

5 Ways To Help Migrant Parents And Children At The Border

Blog

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

5th Circuit Amicus Brief in State of Texas, State of Missouri v Biden: HRF Opposes MPP on the Merits

Amicus Briefs

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A life in safety would not mean anything if my children were not here with me: Joys and Trauma Persist for Refugees Separated from Their Families

Letter

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A Second Chance for Detained Asylum Seekers in Jennings v. Rodriguez

Blog

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A Shameful Record: Biden Administrations Use of Trump Policies Endangers People Seeking Asylum

Reports

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A Sign of Desperation: Syrian Refugees are Selling Their Organs

Blog

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A Sordid Scheme: The Trump Administrations Illegal Return of Asylum Seekers to Mexico

Reports

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A Sordid Scheme: The Trump Administrations Illegal Return of Asylum Seekers to Mexico

Reports

Systemic Injustice-Refugee Protection

A Year After Del Rio, Haitian Asylum Seekers Expelled Under Title 42 Are Still Suffering

Letter

Urge Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act

Human Rights First is a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3). We do not favor or oppose any candidate for public office.