

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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ICE's Lack of a Plan Puts People in Detention and Surrounding Communities at Risk

CLEVELAND The ACLU of Ohio sent a letter today to Immigration and Customs Enforcement Field Office Director Adducci and Sheriffs in Butler, Geauga, Morrow, and Seneca Counties to demand that they provide vaccine access to people in detention at ICE-Contracted jail facilities.

The American Civil Liberties Union sent a letter to Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas and Acting Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Tae Johnson making a similar demand for the [more than 22,100 people](#) in ICE custody nationwide, and ACLU affiliates in eight other states Arizona, Colorado, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Texas are sent similar letters to their local ICE field directors as well.

"In Ohio's four detention facilities, over 80 people have contracted COVID-19. Immigrants detained in Ohio jails have been among the worst injured by this pandemic and the state has neglected or deprived them at every step. Providing vaccines is the bare minimum," noted **Jocelyn Rosnick, Policy Director for the ACLU of Ohio.**

"Over the course of the pandemic, ICE detention facilities have been some of the worst hotspots for the spread of COVID-19, with positivity rates five times greater than prison and 20 times greater than the general U.S. population," said **Eunice Cho, senior staff attorney with the ACLU's National Prison Project.** "Despite this clear, irrefutable evidence of the high risk of COVID-19 to detained people, ICE staff, and surrounding communities, the agency still has no clear plan to ensure that people in detention can be vaccinated. COVID-19 outbreaks continue to spread in detention due to the agency's failures. This is unacceptable and unconscionable, especially at a time where there is ample vaccine availability. Our government can and must ensure all detained people have access to the vaccines, and quickly."

The letter reads: "ICE's failure to ensure a coordinated strategy for vaccination continues to endanger people in detention nationwide. [ICE's COVID-19 plan](#) has left it to individual detention facilities to "contact their state's COVID-19 vaccine resource . . . to obtain vaccine." This vaccination approach, however, has led to widespread failure. While more than 60 percent of adults in the United States have received [at least one dose](#) of a vaccine, the vast majority of people in ICE detention have yet to receive a dose: as of May 7, 2021, [less than seven percent](#) of ICE detainees nationwide had received COVID-19 vaccines. As one court has noted of ICE's failed vaccination policy, "the fact that the federal government has not adopted a plan to insure that they are vaccinated runs counter to the science. Further, it defies common sense given the fact that the United States has a surplus of vaccines and, in fact, plans to export 80 million doses this summer."

The ACLU is also demanding ICE to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate education materials; ensure people who have declined vaccination are reoffered the opportunity regularly and are offered the opportunity to speak with a medical provider; can receive the vaccine within 48 hours of request; make arrangements for a second dose for all people who are released and/or transferred after their first dose.

Fiscal Year 2020 was the deadliest year in ICE detention in 15 years, but as [a recent report](#) from the ACLU pointed out the number of deaths due to COVID-19 was likely higher than the agency reported due to the undercounting of people who died after they were released to the hospital. During the pandemic, there were also reports of increased [use of force](#), [solitary confinement](#), [patterns of sexual abuse](#), [forced sterilizations](#), and an [utter failure](#) to protect people from COVID-19.

In April, the ACLU sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, [calling for the shut down of 39 ICE detention facilities](#), as well as a commitment to let the people who were released during the pandemic to remain free. The administration announced that it would close two of the facilities named in that campaign Irwin County Detention Center and Bristol County Sheriff's Office last week.

Read the letter below.

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