

Detention Watch Network

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/issues/detention-quotas>

Campaign and Advocacy

Local immigration detention quotas arbitrarily funnel people into a sprawling system of unaccountable incarceration

The United States has the largest immigration detention infrastructure in the world with hundreds of thousands of individuals passing through detention each year. The expansion of the system was in part due to an arbitrary quota from Congress, in place from 2009 until 2017, [that required the incarceration of 34,000 immigrants in detention at any given time](#). This quota acted as an artificial floor, propping up the size of the detention system.

The bed quota was removed during the funding negotiations of May 2017 after a long-fought campaign, but it was a hollow victory as the number of people held in immigration detention far exceeded the original quota as the result of a surge in anti-immigrant policies throughout the Trump Administration and Congress continues to fund ICE detention at astronomical levels.

While the national detention bed quota is gone, at least for now, an underlying network of local quotas remains written into detention contracts. These local quotas require ICE to pay for a minimum number of beds that ICE is encouraged to fill and exceed at key detention centers, most of which are involved with private prison corporations.

Local quotas, referred to as guaranteed minimums in detention facility contracts, ensure a profit-stream and can be found in at least half of ICE's field offices. These contractual provisions promise that ICE will pay for a certain number of detention beds regardless of how many people are detained to fill these beds. And as a perverse incentive, ICE agents are then encouraged to increase enforcement in order to maximize taxpayer dollars that are being spent to detain people. (See our report: [Banking on Detention: Local Lockup Quotas & the Immigrant Dragnet](#))

These quotas have become a rigid part of the immigration detention system and must be eliminated. Detention quotas are not only fiscally irresponsible and wasteful, but they help drive policies that continue to deprive liberty and separate immigrants from their loved ones.

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