

# Center for Constitutional Rights

## Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://ccrjustice.org/medically-vulnerable-immigrants-ice-detention-fighting-their-lives>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Immigration detention centers are ticking time bombs in the COVID-19 pandemic. The Center for Constitutional Rights and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIP-NLG) represent more than a dozen medically vulnerable people being detained by ICE who are concerned about the severe risk of contracting coronavirus and developing life-threatening COVID-19 symptoms. Our clients are in detention centers in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana that are notoriously overcrowded, unhealthy, and lack adequate medical facilities or expertise.

Continued detention in these already unsafe facilities may be a death sentence for these men and women, which is why they are seeking release. Here are some of their stories.

Sirous Asgari is a 59-year-old Iranian man currently detained by ICE at the **Winn Correctional Center in Winnfield, Louisiana**. Dr. Asgari, a PhD graduate of Drexel University in Pennsylvania, is a material science and engineering professor. A father of three, he has been living in the United States since 2017 with his wife and family.

Dr. Asgari has been in immigration detention since November 2019. Between then and March 27, 2020, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, Dr. Asgari has been moved numerous times: from Toledo, OH to Tiffin, OH, to Boston, Newark, Brownsville, TX, Harrisburg, PA, Richmond, VA, and the Alexandria Staging Facility ("ASF") in Alexandria, LA. He was most recently transferred to Winn Correctional Center from the ASF after a suspected COVID-19 infection in his pod was discovered. The journeys have been arduous for him. On one occasion, Dr. Asgari recalls travelling for twelve hours, shackled and handcuffed. He eventually collapsed and was told he had a blood pressure reading of 160 over about 90, or stage 2 hypertension.

Conditions at Winn have been nothing short of horrendous and "humiliating," he says. Dr. Asgari shared that between 29 and 44 men share one shower, and two open toilets. Beds are less than two feet apart, and their metal is rusted. It is so humid inside the facility that the bed sheets are often wet from perspiration. Of the six different jails he has been placed in, Dr. Asgari unequivocally believes that Winn has been the worst. He has been suffering from severe lung infections since 2013, making him especially susceptible to pneumonia. In addition, Dr. Asgari has been diagnosed with Grade 2 fatty liver disease, which he controls with a diet.

Dr. Asgari's health is so precarious that he fears he will become seriously ill or die if he contracts COVID-19. He informed ICE of his health issues and requested his release, but received no response. In November 2019, Dr. Asgari asked for voluntary departure to return to Iran, but ICE denied his request and instead is holding him in detention. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and ICE's failure to respond to his request, he has [filed a lawsuit](#) asking for his release. If released, Dr. Asgari would live with his daughter in Redwood City, California.

You can read more about Dr. Asgari's story in a recent [Guardian article](#) and on [ProPublica](#), and sign this [Change.org petition](#) by his children demanding his release.

Talatu Helen Dada is a 40-year-old Nigerian woman currently detained by ICE at **LaSalle ICE Processing Center in Jena, Louisiana**. Prior to her detention, Ms. Dada was a nursing student at Grambling State University in Louisiana.

Ms. Dada has been in immigration detention since 2018. She suffers from Graves' disease, a disorder in which a person's immune system attacks their thyroid. In 2019, while in detention, she received radiation treatment at Louisiana State University Health Shreveport and was kept in shackles throughout the entire treatment process, which lasted eight days. Unfortunately, after her treatment, her condition worsened. Ms. Dada began experiencing heart palpitations, high blood pressure, hair loss, difficulty breathing, and chest pain. She was eventually told by doctors that her immune system was severely compromised. As of January 2020, Ms. Dada was told that her organs were shutting down.

Additionally, Ms. Dada suffers from hypothyroidism, severe asthma that requires the use of four inhalers a day, and an eye condition that is robbing her of her vision. She has been on a liquid diet since August 2019, leaving her extremely malnourished.

Ms. Dada has been held in deplorable conditions at the LaSalle ICE Processing Center. ICE has kept her in a solitary cell since March 22, 2020, where she is experiencing severe anxiety and depression. She recalls how her harrowing experience in ICE detention is surfacing trauma from "attacks on my family in Nigeria, in which I saw my neighbors burned alive in their home, a fate I narrowly escaped."

Despite her deteriorating health and a series of life-threatening medical episodes and visits to the hospital, ICE denied her request for release. Ms. Dada knows that is the only way to keep her safe and [has filed a lawsuit](#) asking for her urgent release in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. If released, Ms. Dada would go live with her sister in Ruston, Louisiana.

Read Ms. Dada's op-ed, [A Mother in ICE Detention Pleads for Her Life](#), on Common Dreams.

Pardeep Kumar is a 28-year-old Indian man currently detained by ICE at **Lasalle ICE Processing Center in Jena, Louisiana**.

Since November 2019, he has been on a hunger strike to peacefully protest his detention and the deplorable conditions he has been forced to endure. ICE staff have been force-feeding Mr. Kumar by forcing tubes through his nose. His body often rejects these supplements, leaving ICE staff to threaten to force-feed him again, perpetuating this painful and cruel treatment. He has lost over 24 pounds while detained, and his body is extremely weak, so much so that he is now in need of a wheelchair to move around. In addition, Mr. Kumar has been suffering from a kidney infection, severely low blood pressure, chest pains, regular swelling on his right arm, severe hair loss, and cloudy and steadily declining vision.

Mr. Kumar's health is so precarious that when ICE attempted to deport him, the pilot on his flight refused to take off because Mr. Kumar appeared so severely emaciated and unwell. He submitted a letter from his doctor advocating for his release and explaining that continued detention seriously threatened his life, but ICE has refused to release him. [He filed a lawsuit](#) asking for his urgent release in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. If released, Mr. Kumar would live with his uncle in Kent, Washington.

Nadira Sampath Grant is a 53-year-old woman from Trinidad and Tobago currently detained in ICE custody at **LaSalle ICE Processing Center in Jena, Louisiana**.

Ms. Grant has suffered from diabetes for 17 years and requires daily medication, without which, she could suffer from a stroke or kidney failure. ICE does not provide her with a diabetic-friendly diet, which is critical for keeping her glucose levels under control. Ms. Grant also has diabetic neuropathy, meaning her nerves are damaged and she experiences burning sensations in her hands and feet daily, as well as being at risk for the loss of her limbs.

Conditions at the LaSalle ICE Processing Center make it prone to a COVID-19 outbreak. Ms. Grant shares a dorm with 80 people in which they sleep, eat, and rest. She and others are responsible for all the cleaning in the space, and have nothing more to sanitize it than several rags and small bottles of soap. Ms. Grant recently described a protest at her facility related to these poor conditions in light of the current pandemic, which resulted in individuals being pepper sprayed:

"On Tuesday March 24, 2020, when they did the dorm-by-dorm presentation about the virus, one of the units protested to be let free. This was the women's dorm right next to us. One girl in our unit came to look through the door to see what was happening and started hyperventilating because she's asthmatic and breathed in some of the pepper spray, and then started to have a seizure. The women in the dorm next door who were pepper sprayed are in solitary confinement now, about four. We had to evacuate the unit because of all the pepper spray coming into the room."

Ms. Grant's health is so precarious that she [joined a lawsuit](#) asking for her urgent release in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. If released, she would live with her husband and son in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Alex Hernandez is a 49-year-old Honduran man currently detained in ICE custody at the **Etowah County Detention Center in Gadsden, Alabama**. He has been in ICE custody since October 2016.

Mr. Hernandez suffers from hypertension and Barrett's esophagus, which puts him at a higher risk for cancer. Since being in ICE custody, Mr. Hernandez has not had a single endoscopy or biopsy, despite the need to have yearly tests to detect potentially cancerous cells. He is currently experiencing pain, weakness, and inflammation from a recent surgery.

Conditions at Etowah have made it especially prone to a coronavirus outbreak. All warning signs pertaining to the coronavirus are in English, despite the limited English proficiency of most detained individuals, and guards and other staff do not wear gloves or masks. In addition, new individuals are transferred into the facility without being tested, despite exhibiting severe symptoms of the virus. In one instance, Mr. Hernandez recalls:

"These events created despair and fear among the individuals in our unit. Individuals in the unit were begging staff not to accept the transfers. When the staff did not comply, two individuals tied nooses around their necks and stepped on the railings of the second floor, threatening to jump off and commit suicide unless the new transfers were removed. Finally, the three new transfers were removed. After this incident, all detained individuals in the unit were provided one surgical mask each."

If he were released, Mr. Hernandez would live with his daughter in East Los Angeles, California.

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