

# **GROUND ZERO: DETAINEES; Civil Liberties Groups Sue U.S. On Closed Immigration Hearings**

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## **Body**

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Several **civil liberties groups sued** the federal government today, challenging its **closed immigration hearings** for those detained in New Jersey in the investigation of the Sept. 11 terror attacks.

New Jersey is home to hundreds of immigrants who were taken into custody after the attacks, and this lawsuit is the second over the detentions filed by the state chapter of the American **Civil Liberties** Union -- this time on behalf of two newspapers seeking to attend the **hearings**.

An unspecified number of unidentified **detainees** from Jersey City, Paterson and other immigrant population centers in North Jersey have been held in the area's county jails since being rounded up in the wake of the attacks six months ago. Passaic County has acknowledged that its jail houses about 150 **detainees** under a contract with the federal **Immigration** and Naturalization Service.

This morning, the New Jersey A.C.L.**U.**, the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York and other legal **groups** filed suit in Federal District Court here, challenging the constitutionality of **hearings** that have been ordered **closed** by Michael J. Creppy, the nation's chief **immigration** judge. Essentially, the suit asserts that the First Amendment protects access to government proceedings.

Judge Creppy, following a directive from the **United States** attorney general, John Ashcroft, issued a Sept. 21 memo on these so-called special interest cases, instructing his subordinates to "hold the **hearings** individually, to **close** the **hearing** to the public and to avoid discussing the case or otherwise disclosing any information about the case to anyone outside the **Immigration** Court."

The A.C.L.**U.** named Mr. Ashcroft and Judge Creppy as defendants in the suit filed today, which was brought on behalf of The New Jersey Law Journal and The Herald News, which is based in West Paterson.

Stephen McCarthy, a managing editor for The Herald News, which has a daily circulation of 38,000, said the lawsuit was intended "to ensure the free flow of information to which our readers are entitled."

A **hearing** on the lawsuit is scheduled for April 5.

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