

Immigrants Mistreated, Report Says

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Byline: Spencer S. Hsu, Washington Post Staff Writer

Body

U.S. authorities **mistreated** suspected illegal **immigrants** at five prisons and jails nationwide, violating federal standards meant to ensure safe and humane custody, according to a government **report** released yesterday.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials and contractors denied timely medical treatment to some of the **immigrants**, failed to disclose and justify disciplinary actions against them, and improperly limited access to relatives, lawyers and immigration authorities, according to the Department of Homeland Security inspector general.

Detention officers failed to establish a system to **report** abuse and violated health and safety rules by neglecting to monitor prisoners on hunger strikes or suicide watches and by serving undercooked food, the **report said**.

The **report** comes amid a sharp increase in illegal **immigrants** in U.S. detention as Congress and the Bush administration debate an overhaul of immigration laws and promise tougher enforcement of existing laws. Civil liberties and **immigrant** advocacy groups are stepping up scrutiny of conditions. Jorge Bustamante, the U.N. special rapporteur on human rights of **immigrants**, has asked to visit U.S. detention centers next month.

Critics of the agency called the **report** disappointing, contending that it watered down recommendations and ignored the most serious allegations of abuse collected since June 2004, which they **said** included physical beatings, medical neglect, food shortages and mixing of illegal **immigrants** in administrative custody with criminals.

"It took two years for them to come out with this? It's incredibly disappointing," **said** Judy Rabinovitz, a lawyer with the ACLU **immigrants** rights project.

Eric Lerner, a spokesman for the New Jersey Civil Rights Defense Committee, called the **report** a "whitewash" that was delayed to suppress controversy. Bryan Lonagan, a lawyer with the Legal Aid Society in New York City, **said** that DHS has not designated 38 detention standards implemented since 2000 as federal regulations, making them unenforceable.

A spokeswoman for Richard L. Skinner, the DHS inspector general, **said** the **report** was delayed because its scope was reduced.

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In a written response to the report, DHS Assistant Secretary Julie L. Myers concurred at least partly with nine of 13 findings and promised changes. But she said they "do not indicate any systemic failure" at nearly 400 facilities where ICE is authorized to house as many as 27,500 people a night, because they were based on individual allegations at a small sample of sites.

ICE operations are "generally in compliance with its National Detention Standards," Myers said.

The audit examined the U.S.-owned and operated Krome Service Processing Center in Miami, a contract Corrections Corporation of American facility in San Diego, and local jails and prisons in Berks County, Pa., and Hudson and Passaic counties, N.J.

In December 2005, ICE ordered all suspected illegal immigrants removed from the Passaic jail in Paterson, N.J., after a string of critical news accounts, including the disclosure that guards used police dogs against prisoners. DHS has since barred that practice.

Although illegal immigrants are held on administrative grounds and are supposed to be segregated by high, medium and low risk, authorities often house them together with criminals, the report said.

Many contract and state and local correction officers were unaware of separate U.S. standards for detained immigrants, the 54-page report noted. ICE itself overlooks violations in annual inspections, the report said. "A final rating of Acceptable was given to all five detention facilities," the report said. "However, our review of the five facilities identified instances of non-compliance . . . that were not identified during the ICE annual inspection."

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