

EXPOSE & CLOSE

I. INTRODUCTION

ICE must alleviate the suffering of those at Irwin by immediately terminating its Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) with the county and releasing those inside.

In 2009, after an extensive record of abuses and deaths of immigrants in its custody, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced ambitious reform plans and promised a “truly civil” immigration detention system. Yet, more than three years later, ICE continues to subcontract the detention of individuals to county jails and private detention centers where they suffer sexual assault, substandard medical care, lack of due process and abysmal conditions. Among those detained are lawful permanent residents, asylum seekers, crime victims, and survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking—many of them with U.S. citizen relatives and deep ties to local communities. ICE has consistently shown that it is incapable of protecting the basic human rights of immigrants under its care.



In January 2012, the ACLU of Georgia received a letter through family members of immigrants being held by ICE at the Irwin County Detention Center. The letter stated that people at Irwin were staging a hunger strike to protest the conditions at the facility

beginning Wednesday, January 25, 2012. The letter read, in part: “This is our Right to be tak[en] care of with respect, dignity, and to be treat[ed] like human beings, not animals.”

The terrible conditions that prompted the letter continue unabated today. Sick people often go untreated or receive inadequate treatment because of understaffed medical and mental health units, people face serious challenges in preparing for their legal cases because of inadequate access to the law library, and Irwin’s extremely remote location inhibits people from finding legal representation and from communicating and visiting with their families. There continue to be numerous reports of poor food and hygiene, extreme temperatures, inadequate access to outdoor recreation, and costly phone charges. Yet people fear retaliation from facility staff if they complain. ICE must alleviate the suffering of those at Irwin by immediately terminating its Intergovernmental Service Agreement (IGSA) with the county and releasing those inside.

Irwin County Detention Center (Irwin) is a 1,201-bed jail located in Ocilla, Georgia, a rural community more than three hours south of Atlanta. Irwin began to house immigrants in ICE custody in December of 2010. Irwin’s staff is all employed by Detention Management,



LLC., a private prison corporation. ICE has space for 512 individuals at Irwin. In September 2011, the facility was holding about half that number of immigrants, with 65 percent of those male and 35 percent female.

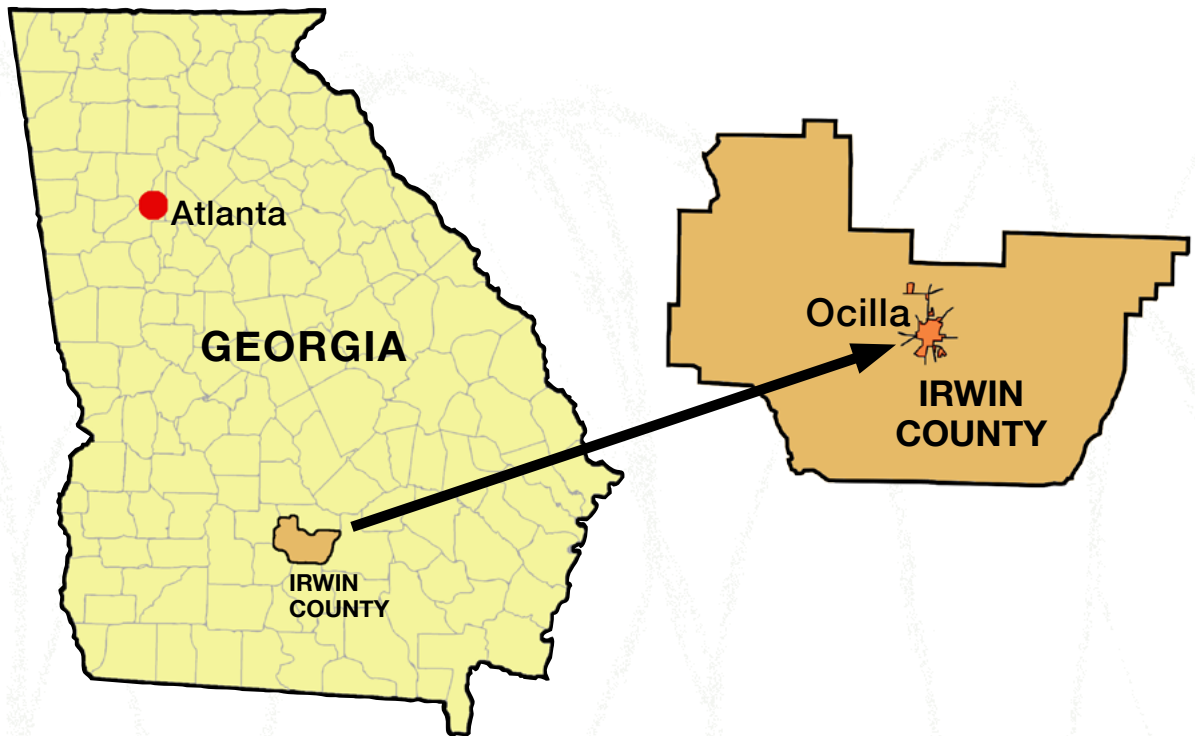
This report takes most of its information from a 2012 report by the ACLU of Georgia: Prisoners of Profit: Immigrants and Detention in Georgia, available at: http://www.acluga.org/files/2713/3788/2900/Prisoners_of_Profit.pdf.

II. FACILITY OVERVIEW

3 1/2 hours:

Distance between Ocilla and Atlanta

- ▶ **Location:** 132 Cotton Drive Ocilla, GA (approximately three and a half hours from Atlanta)
- ▶ **Average daily population:** 512
- ▶ **Cost per bed per day:** \$45
- ▶ **Nearest ICE Field Office:** Atlanta, GA
- ▶ **Legal Orientation Program:** No



III. CONCERNS

INADEQUATE MEDICAL CARE



People at Irwin report facing unreasonable delays in receiving medical care. The case of Dulce Bolaños-Estrada, who was diagnosed with cancer in July 2009, provides an illustrative example. In the spring of 2011, with three more months of chemotherapy to undergo, Dulce was detained at Irwin. At intake, she



Although she had been able to talk to her attorney over the phone, her phone calls were monitored and she was not able to secure a private line to have a confidential conversation.

says they administered a TB test and asked her some questions at which point she told them she had cancer. She was not given a physical exam or a visit to the doctor that day, and over a week later, she was still waiting to see a doctor. All she was given was hydrocodone for the pain. "It has been a year since my last exam. I am in pain," she said. "They do not monitor my condition.... [The doctor] is never here."

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Dulce Bolaños-Estrada

Jovita Campuzano Jimenez requested medical care when she arrived at Irwin because she was in pain after being in an automobile accident. "I have repeatedly asked for an x-ray for really bad pain I have in my head from the accident. I have yet to receive anything. I have really blurred vision. The doctor is never in. I have just been ignored."

Jose Ponce told the nurse at intake that he was diabetic and had high blood pressure, but it took three weeks for him to start receiving his medication. Peter Obande Jacobs, who is also diabetic and has high blood pressure, stated that he did not receive medication until six days after he entered the facility. After putting in requests and filing complaints for over a month because she could not see a member of the medical staff, Angela Kelley went on a hunger strike that lasted six days. At the end of that period, she was finally able to see a nurse.

FACILITY DUE PROCESS CONCERNS

The ACLU of Georgia and other attorneys have had difficulty with the attorney visitation policy at Irwin. On Thursday, December 2, 2011, Chaka Washington traveled to Irwin to interview immigrants inside. Upon arrival, Ms. Washington, a licensed Georgia attorney, was informed that she would not be allowed to meet with anyone because the detention

center required consent from ICE prior to every visitation. Upon receiving this information, the ACLU of Georgia contacted ICE representative Pamela J. Reeves. After Ms. Reeves spoke with Irwin officials to give her consent, Ms. Washington returned to the facility and provided officers with a list of the names of the individuals with whom she wished to meet, only to be informed by the officers that she and an accompanying interpreter would not be able to meet with any people that day because "too much was going on" and that, if they left the names of people with the officers, they could schedule a meeting with them the following day. ICE eventually told the ACLU of Georgia that there was a lockdown at the facility that day.

People also reported concerns about the monitoring of attorney phone calls. Dulce Bolaños-Estrada, who had an attorney provided to her through Catholic Charities, had only met with her attorney in person once. Although she had been able to talk to her attorney over the phone, her phone calls were monitored and she was not able to secure a private line to have a confidential conversation. This directly violates attorney-client confidentiality and ICE's policy which states that "facilities may not monitor any call to an attorney."

Although Irwin's Detainee Handbook states that the law library is open 9 hours a day, 5 days a week, people reported having difficulty accessing the law library. Dulce Bolaños-Estrada wanted to visit the law library, but there was a waiting period while her request was processed. "You have to specifically ask the guards and schedule [a time to visit]. They are not very helpful." At the time of the interview with the ACLU of Georgia, Dulce had been waiting for almost a week to visit the library. Maria Francisco was completely unaware that there was a law library or access to legal materials provided. Florent Kalala complained that for over 250 detainees at the facility, there are only two working computers in the law library.

DEVASTATING IMPACT OF TRANSFER TO IRWIN

Even when transferred from one facility to another within the state, transfers can be hard



According to a number of those interviewed, the guards at Irwin frequently yell or snap at people... but she, like others interviewed, is afraid to complain to them for fear of being yelled at or thrown into segregation.



on detained individuals and their families. Ignacio Morales and his family lived about half an hour

outside of Atlanta. When he was detained at the Cobb County jail, he was still able to see his five-year-old daughter. At the time he spoke with the ACLU of Georgia, he had been detained at Irwin for eight months and had not seen his family at all during that time because of the distance. Dulce Bolaños-Estrada was transferred from North Georgia Detention Center to Irwin, which is much farther from her friends and family making it harder for them to visit with her. Norberto Neira has four children, two of whom are under 18; the youngest is just five years old. He reported that his children were suffering terribly from the separation, and he believes that his five year old will need to see a psychologist to work through issues related to their separation. When his wife and children come to visit him, the entire lobby is disturbed by the youngest child's crying; his "sobs, cries, screams [are] so loud."

INADEQUATE LIVING CONDITIONS

There are a total of 16 housing units at Irwin—eight male and eight female units. Each unit has 32 beds and is divided into a common area and two or four person cells. The cells each have a shower, washbasin, and toilet. At intake, in addition to a medical screening that consists of a list of questions, a TB test, and a medical exam, hygiene items, uniforms, and bedding are distributed. There are also three phones in each unit, tables for meals/recreation, and two televisions, one in Spanish and one in English.

Detainees often have to wait longer than one week to get clean sheets, towels, and pillowcases. A clean change of undergarments and socks are not easy to come by either. "It's very gross. We have to wash them in our own cells," says Dulce Bolaños-Estrada. Maria Francisco reported that clothes are supposedly washed, but come back smelling bad and looking dirty.

Some of these units do not maintain a stable temperature. Individuals reported that temperatures fluctuate from extremely hot to extremely cold. In the two months Maria Francisco had been detained at Irwin, her unit had lost air conditioning three times. She reported that, "the heat is unbearable."

Irwin's handbook states that phone calls to attorneys and family members are monitored and are capped at 15 minutes per call. As in other facilities, the cost of placing calls outside the facility is extremely high, and many

"..the heat is unbearable."

Maria Francisco

detainees spend all their money on phone calls alone. Particularly at Irwin, with people detained so far away from loved ones, access to a functioning and affordable phone system is a necessity.

According to detainee interviews, the food provided to detainees at Irwin is inadequate in quantity and subpar in quality. Many people interviewed reported losing significant amounts of weight while detained at Irwin. Others reported being served undercooked and rancid food as well as finding foreign objects in the food. Individuals with medical conditions requiring special diets reported not receiving medically appropriate meals.

Irwin provides both indoor and outdoor recreation; however, the hours are restricted and do not comply with ICE detention standards that require one hour of outdoor recreation per day, five days per week.

ABUSE OF POWER

According to a number of those interviewed, the guards at Irwin frequently yell or snap at people. Veronica does not know what the guards are saying since they always speak in English, but she, like others interviewed, is afraid to complain to them for fear of being yelled at or thrown into segregation. "Officers often scream at me," says Jovita, who does not understand what they are saying and many times does not even know what she



has done to provoke them. People at Irwin are very afraid of retaliatory behavior from the guards if they complain or misspeak.

Most people interviewed were provided little or no information about the grievance procedures at Irwin. Indeed, in some cases, individuals were unaware of the existence of a grievance procedure at all. The lack of knowledge most interviewees, especially those who did not speak English, had about the grievance

procedure at Irwin was shocking. Maria Francisco, Jovita Campuzano Jimenez, and Ignacio Morales were completely unaware that they could submit a written grievance. All three were also afraid to complain to the guards, so they just remained silent. "I was told at orientation I could verbally complain, but nobody does," Jovita said. Even those who are aware of the procedure, however, are afraid to use it because they fear being subject to retaliation by facility staff.



Photo: Women's Refugee Commission/Katharina Obser

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS



Except where a publication is cited, the information reported here is based solely on claims made by detained individuals without independent corroboration.

1. ICE should terminate its contract with this facility provider and cease housing immigrants at this facility. The remote location of Irwin alone makes it inappropriate for housing immigrants.
 - ▶ Release anyone not subject to mandatory detention.
2. While taking steps to close the Irwin Detention Center, ICE should make the following urgent changes to protect those in its custody:
 - ▶ Conduct staff training to ensure that there is no monitoring of phone calls with attorneys.
 - ▶ Institute meaningful grievance procedures and ensure that every person detained at Irwin understands them and can take advantage of them.
 - ▶ Provide better training for corrections officers on how to interact with an immigrant population.
 - ▶ Expand and improve staffing of medical unit with additional doctors.
 - ▶ Address the concerns about food quality, hygiene, and temperature control.

This report is part of a series about conditions at ten prisons and jails where immigrants are detained by ICE. To read the other reports and the Executive Summary of overall concerns and recommendations, please go to detentionwatchnetwork.org/exposeandclose