DETENTION
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Lives Lost in ICE Custody Reach Record High Under Trump

Overview

In Fiscal Year 2026, 37 people died in **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody**, making it the **deadliest fiscal year in the agency's entire history. A total of 60 people have died in ICE custody during President Trump's second term, and many more have been killed by ICE during operations.**

These deaths are not isolated tragedies. They reflect an irreparable system strained by unchecked expansion, aggressive targeting of communities, and historically inhumane conditions, including abuse and medical neglect, enabled by a culture of secrecy and a lack of accountability.

What's Happening

Since January 2025, the Trump administration's aggressive targeting of immigrant communities has led to a sharp increase in the number of people held in ICE detention, nearly doubling from January 2025 to February of 2026 when the number of people in ICE detention reached a record breaking 73,000. Central to this mass deportation campaign is a plan to expand ICE's capacity to detain more than 100,000 people at a time. Congress has fueled this expansion by approving $240 billion for immigration enforcement, including $45 billion specifically for ICE detention. The agency has since added more than 100 long-term detention facilities to its list of active facilities, again nearly doubling the number of facilities actively in use from January 2025 to July 2026.

For nearly two years now, ICE has implemented a multi-layered detention expansion plan, opening dozens of new ICE detention centers, including facilities that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) itself once deemed unsafe, such as Irwin Detention Center and Etowah County Jail, and activating dormant federal and state prisons with documented histories of unsafe and deadly conditions. DHS has also extended ICE's reach by using military bases such as Guantanamo and Fort Bliss, entering into partnerships with state governments as in Florida and Louisiana, and even expanding offshore through international agreements, such as with El Salvador to use the notorious Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo (CECOT) prison. ICE has also converted industrial warehouses into ICE detention facilities, increased the number of ICE-owned detention centers by purchasing private prisons and land to build new facilities, has plans to expand off-shore detention, and has added mobile detention vans to its system.

People detained inside these facilities continue to raise the alarm about unconscionable conditions of confinement such as inadequate food and water, physical and verbal abuse, worsening medical neglect, overcrowding, and frequent transfers that cause confusion and sever ties to family and support networks. So far in 2026 detained people have taken part in at least a dozen hunger strikes across the detention system, demanding safety, dignity and freedom to be with their families.

In October, more than 500 people participated in a hunger strike at the Folkston D. Ray James ICE Processing Center. The hunger strikers have reported hostile, discriminatory and and xenophobic treatment, poor conditions and medical neglect. ICE has retaliated against at least 30 people by placing them in solitary confinement. Also in October, several men and women detained at the El Valle Detention Facility went on hunger strike to protest their prolonged detention.

What these hunger strikers and detained people across the country are telling us today has been documented for more than two decades. ICE detention is inherently inhumane and unnecessary. It is marked by violence, abuse, neglect, and conditions that have repeatedly proven deadly. The administration has attempted to further weaken already inadequate detention standards to enable faster expansion, and has all but dismantled any semblance of oversight within the agency. In the first months of the current administration, DHS attempted to dismantle insufficient yet critical oversight mechanisms that previously provided an avenue for investigating discrimination, neglect, and abuse, including the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, the Immigration Detention Ombudsman, and the Office of Inspector General. While not entirely successful due to litigation, the administration has eliminated hundreds of oversight positions, further weakening accountability across immigration detention centers nationwide.

Additionally, the administration has attempted to hamper authorized congressional oversight, despite long-standing appropriations law establishing the right and responsibility of Members of Congress to conduct unannounced inspections to carry out their oversight functions. For families who have lost loved ones in detention, obtaining answers has become nearly impossible.

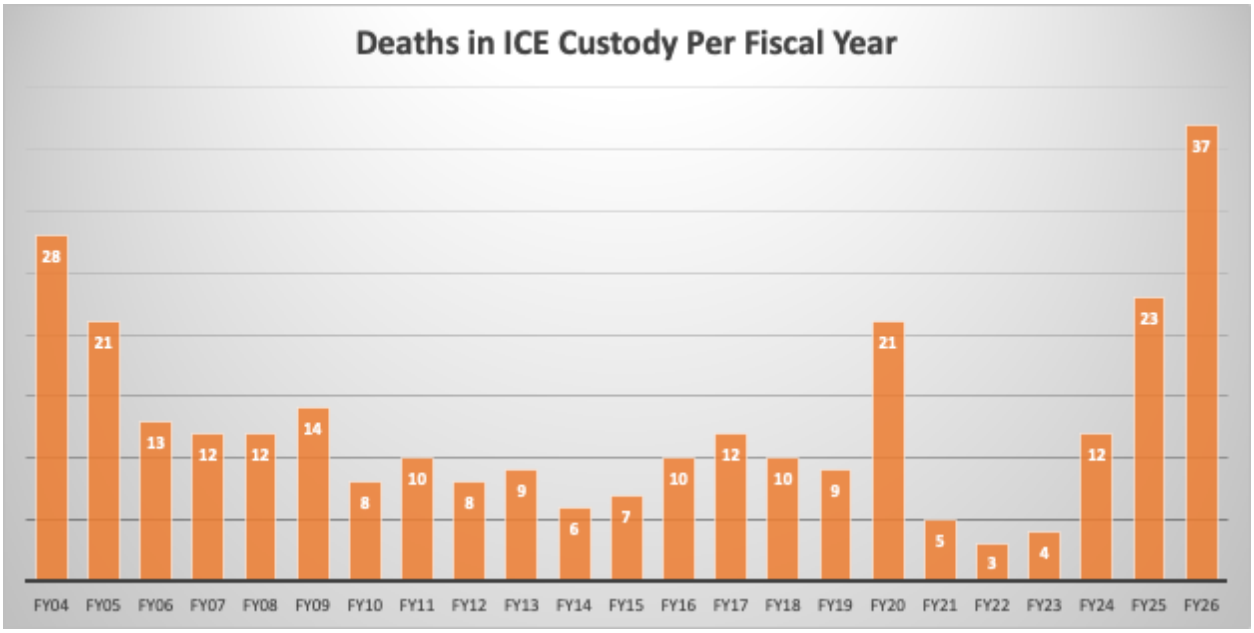
Understanding the Impact

Since ICE's creation in 2003, more than 300 people have died while in ICE custody. Not only has the number of people dying in ICE custody reached record numbers, but the rate of deaths is also increasing, pointing to deteriorating conditions and an exacerbating culture of violence and disregard for human life.These deaths are the consequence of a mass detention system built on a culture of violence and secrecy, and they represent families torn apart and traumatized.

ICE detention is inherently inhumane and deadly because it is fundamentally designed to deter migration, and because of the perverse financial incentives that are integral to the system. The Trump administration has intensified the deterrence justifications for detention, as evident in its push to use detention conditions as a way to force people to self-deport. To support this policy

choice, ICE has employed a contracting system that incentives private corporations and local governments across the country to skimp on medical care, food, and facility maintenance to make a profit. Over 90% of people in ICE detention are in facilities operated by private prison companies, which have been teeming to rake in millions at the expense of people's lives. These companies have repeatedly cut medical services, staffing, and basic living conditions to maximize profits, even when those cuts have proven deadly.

The record number of deaths this year is not a coincidence but the result of deliberate policy choices: the chaotic targeting of communities coupled with explosive detention expansion and weakened oversight. Each death is a reminder that the system is not only failing to protect those in its custody but is actively putting lives at risk.



What Congress Can Do

Congress has the authority and responsibility to demand accountability from the DHS and to end the federal government's use of deadly immigration detention. Lawmakers can set the stage for long-overdue closures, bring transparency to a system that has operated for too long without meaningful oversight, and ultimately end the practice of immigration detention for good.

We call on members of Congress to:

1. **Zero out ICE funding in upcoming appropriations bills, revoke the billions given to ICE through reconciliation funding,** and instead redirect that public money towards policies and programs that support and uplift all communities, including healthcare, food assistance, and education.

2. **Demand the closure of immigration detention centers, starting with those with the most documented patterns of neglect, abuse, and preventable deaths.** No facility with a record of endangering lives should remain in operation.

3. **Exercise their right and responsibility to conduct unannounced inspections of DHS facilities** and to codify that right.

4. **Stand with the families of those who have died in detention by requiring DHS to conduct and publicly release detainee death reviews.** These reviews must include findings on whether ICE and facility operators complied with medical and detention standards and must be accessible to the public to ensure transparency and accountability.