

## Activist Sues Trump Admin for \$20M Over Detention

July 11, 2025

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Khalil, a 30-year-old Syrian-born Palestinian and permanent U.S. resident who recently earned a graduate degree from Columbia University, has filed a \$20 million legal claim (a prerequisite under the Federal Tort Claims Act) against the Trump administration. He claims he was wrongfully imprisoned, politically targeted, and mistreated for over three months, all because of his vocal support for Palestinian rights.

Khalil was arrested on March 8, 2024, while returning from dinner with his wife. According to his legal team, plainclothes ICE agents arrested him without a warrant at his Manhattan

residence, then transferred him first to a facility in New Jersey before sending him over 1,000 miles away to the Central Louisiana ICE Processing Center (LaSalle Detention Center) in Jena, Louisiana, where his location was initially concealed from his family and attorneys.

During his 104-day detention, Khalil says he was denied ulcer medication, subjected to harsh conditions, and received inadequate food, which caused significant weight loss; he recalled, “I don’t remember a single night I went to sleep full.”

The Trump administration accused him of allegedly making false statements on his green card application and labeled him a “terrorist sympathizer,” claiming his activism posed a foreign policy threat; Khalil has strongly denied any ties to terrorist groups and emphasized his opposition to antisemitism.

His claim, filed under the Federal Tort Claims Act, names the Department of Homeland Security, ICE, and the State Department. Khalil believes he was targeted simply for speaking out. “They want people like me to stay silent,” he said. “But I won’t be intimidated.”

A memo from Secretary of State Marco Rubio did not accuse Khalil of wrongdoing but recommended deportation under a rarely used 1952 law provision, based on the State Department’s view that his political speech could undermine U.S. foreign policy.

Despite his suffering, Khalil assisted other detainees with translation and paperwork, drawing on skills from his prior work in Beirut. His legal battle continues after a federal judge ordered his release on June 20, ruling that his detention under the State Department’s foreign policy provision likely violated the Constitution.

Now, the government has added allegations that Khalil misrepresented prior employment and associations on his green card application, allegations his lawyers argue are retaliatory and highly unusual. Still, Khalil remains determined.

If he wins his case, he plans to use the funds to support others who have been similarly mistreated. If not, he says, an apology and policy reform would be enough. “This isn’t just about me,” Khalil said. “If no one pushes back, they’ll keep doing this to others again and again.”

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