

Judge Demands Florida and Federal Records on ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ Authority

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A federal judge has ordered Florida and U.S. officials to turn over all documentation outlining who has legal authority over the controversial South Florida Detention Facility, widely referred to as “Alligator Alcatraz.” The demand comes amid mounting legal challenges over detainee rights, facility conditions, and environmental violations.

The court's directive for full disclosure of operational agreements could determine whether federal agencies such as Immigration and Customs Enforcement are directly involved in managing the site. If so, jurisdiction could shift to federal courts, significantly altering the course of ongoing litigation.

The judge's order also marks a pivotal moment in the growing scrutiny over the facility's purpose, oversight, and legality.

The facility, built in July on a remote airstrip within the Big Cypress National Preserve, can hold up to 5,000 immigration detainees in tents and trailers surrounded by Everglades swampland. Florida officials, led by Governor Ron DeSantis and Attorney General James Uthmeier, claim the natural setting provides security through isolation, with alligators and wetlands acting as deterrents.

Civil rights attorneys argue the site is operating without proper oversight, alleging that some individuals are being held without criminal charges or access to legal representation. Complaints also point to canceled bond hearings and reports of pressure on detainees to sign deportation orders without meeting with attorneys.

Attorneys for Florida and federal agencies claim the lawsuits may have been filed in the wrong jurisdiction. The facility is located in Collier County, while the legal challenges were brought in a Miami-based federal court. A ruling on whether the venue is appropriate is expected to influence both civil rights and environmental proceedings.

In a parallel case, environmental and tribal groups, particularly the Miccosukee Tribe, have filed suit, arguing the facility violates federal

protections for the preserve and infringes on tribal land rights. Their lawsuit challenges the legality of constructing such a facility in a protected ecosystem thorough review or public input.

Early detainee reports describe overcrowding, lack of sanitation, limited access to phones and showers, and questionable food quality. While some individuals have already been deported, many remain in limbo, awaiting legal outcomes or further administrative decisions.