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U.S. ICE Detention Centers Face Human Rights Scrutiny

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In early August, U.S. immigration detention numbers reached an all-time high, exceeding 60,000 individuals. The surge has placed strain on facilities, highlighting ongoing concerns over conditions in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody.

To manage the increased population, the Trump administration relied on federal prisons, county jails, temporary state facilities, and holding cells not intended for long-term use.

These spaces have faced reports of overcrowding and inadequate resources.

On August 12, U.S. District Judge Lewis Kaplan issued an order requiring ICE to improve conditions in its New York City offices. The ruling called for more spacious cells, bedding for each detainee, hygiene supplies, three meals daily, access to water on request, and the ability to communicate with legal counsel. The order responded to a lawsuit from a detainee alleging lack of medical care, overcrowding, and limited access to showers.

Similar issues have been identified elsewhere. In July, a federal judge reviewing conditions at a temporary ICE facility in Los Angeles found that detainees were likely being denied legal access, raising constitutional concerns. A report from Senator Jon Ossoff's office detailed 510 "credible reports" of human rights abuses across federal lockups, county jails, and military bases used for immigration detention.

According to the report, 41 of these cases involved physical or sexual abuse, 14 involved mistreatment of pregnant women, and 18 involved children. One case described a pregnant woman in custody who reportedly experienced extended bleeding before receiving medical attention, ultimately resulting in a miscarriage without immediate support.

Federal Detention Center (FDC) Miami has also faced scrutiny. Earlier investigations by Reason and the Miami Herald reported overcrowding, limited access to legal counsel and phone calls, and administrative dysfunction. A July report from several human rights and legal aid groups highlighted an incident at a Miami facility where detainees were reportedly forced to wait for hours to receive meals, eating while restrained.

Former detainees have described similar conditions at other Florida facilities. At Krome Detention Center, one individual recounted spending four days in a holding cell with 50 to 60 others, with limited access to medication. In Everglades detention facilities, reports cited overcrowding, restricted legal access, and limited medical care.

Concerns have persisted under the Biden administration. Audio recordings from a migrant youth tent camp at Fort Bliss, Texas, obtained by Reason, indicated poor conditions, limited medical support, and staff conduct issues.

Efforts to expand detention capacity continue. In July, the federal government awarded a \$238 million contract to construct and operate a new detention centre at Fort Bliss, set to become the largest in the country. ICE officials have maintained that the expansion is

intended to accommodate the growing detainee population while providing secure housing and access to legal and medical resources.

The rise in detention numbers and documented facility issues underscores ongoing human rights concerns in the U.S. immigration system. Federal courts, advocacy organisations, and lawmakers continue to monitor the situation to ensure that legal, medical, and safety standards are maintained for all detainees.