

Migrants languish in US detention centers



EVAN VUCCI, ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE 2025

President Donald Trump tours “Alligator Alcatraz” in this July file photo. Prolonged detention has become more common in President Donald Trump’s second term, at least partly because a new policy generally prohibits immigration judges from releasing detainees while their deportation cases wind through backlogged courts.

GISELA SALOMON
Associated Press

MIAMI — Felipe Hernandez Espinosa spent 45 days at “Alligator Alcatraz,” an immigration holding center in Florida where detainees have reported worms in their food, toilets that don’t flush and overflowing sewage. Mosquitoes and other insects are everywhere.

For the past five months, the 34-year-old asylum-seeker has been at an immigration detention camp at the Fort Bliss Army base in El Paso, Texas, where two migrants died in January and which has many of the same conditions, according to human rights groups. Hernandez said he asked to be returned to Nicaragua but was told he has to see a judge. After nearly seven months in detention, his hearing was scheduled for Feb. 26.

Prolonged detention has become more common in President Donald Trump’s second term, at least partly because a new policy generally prohibits immigration judges from releasing detainees while their deportation cases wind through backlogged courts. Many, like Hernandez, are prepared to give up any efforts to stay in the United States.

“I came to this country thinking they would help me, and I’ve been detained for six months without having committed a crime,” he said in a phone interview from Fort Bliss. “It is been too long. I am desperate.”

The Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that Immigration and Customs Enforcement cannot hold immigrants indefinitely, finding that six months was a reasonable cap.

With the number of people in ICE detention topping 70,000 for the first time, 7,252 people had been in custody at least six months in mid-January, including 79 held for more than two years, according to agency data. That’s more than double the 2,849 who were in ICE custody at least six months in December 2024, the last full month of



CHRISTIAN CHAVEZ, ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE 2025

Migrants wearing face masks and shackles on their hands and feet sit on a military aircraft at Fort Bliss in El Paso in this January 2025 file photo.

Joe Biden’s presidency.

The Trump administration is offering plane fare and \$2,600 for people who leave the country voluntarily. Yet Hernandez and others are told they can’t leave detention until seeing a judge.

**Legal advisers:
Cases not isolated**

The first three detainees that attorney Ana Alicia Huerta met on her monthly trip to an ICE detention center in McFarland, California, to offer free legal advice in January said they signed a form agreeing to leave the United States but were still waiting.

“All are telling me: ‘I don’t understand why I’m here. I’m ready to be deported,’” said Huerta, a senior attorney at the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice. “That’s an experience that I’ve never had before.”

A Chinese man has been held for more than a year without seeing an immigration judge, even though he told authorities he was ready to be deported. In the past, Huerta said, she encountered cases like this once every three or four months.

The Department of Homeland Security did not address questions from The Associated Press about why more people are being held longer than six months.

“The conditions are so poor and so bad that people say, ‘I’m going to give up,’” said Sui Cheng, executive director at Americans for Immigrant Justice.

The waiting time may depend on the country. Deportations to Mexico are routine but countries including Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia and Venezuela have at times resisted accepting deportees.

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Trump: Keep home prices climbing

JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump wants to keep home prices high, bypassing calls to ramp up construction so people can afford what has been a ticket to the middle class.

Trump has instead argued for protecting existing owners

who have watched the values of their homes climb. It’s a position that flies in the face of what many economists, the real estate industry, local officials and apartment dwellers say is needed to fix a big chunk of America’s affordability problem.

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JENNY KANE, ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE 2025

President Trump has instead argued for protecting existing owners who have watched the values of their homes climb rather than boost construction that could help more people reach home ownership.

DOJ OKs unredacted Epstein files to Congress

ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Donald Trump has lashed out at reporters raising questions about the Epstein files, demanding that the country “get onto something else,” but that’s highly unlikely. Many of the documents haven’t been released, and the ones now public were heavily redacted.

The Department of Justice will allow members of Congress to review unredacted files on the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein starting on Monday, according to a letter that was sent to lawmakers. The letter obtained by The Associated Press says that lawmakers will be able to review unredacted versions of the more than 3 million files that the Justice Department has released to comply with a law passed by Congress last year.

While investigators collected ample proof that Epstein sexually abused underage girls, they found scant evidence the well-connected financier led a sex trafficking ring serving powerful men, an Associated Press review of internal Justice Department records shows.

Meanwhile, Trump said he won’t apologize for a racist social media post featuring former President Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama. The White House ultimately blamed the post on a staffer and Trump said “I didn’t make a mistake.”

And Dr. Mehmet Oz is urging people to get inoculated against the measles at a time of outbreaks across several states and as the United States is at risk of losing its measles elimination status. “Take the vaccine, please,” said Oz, “We have a solution for our problem.”

Lawsuit: About 1,000 Arizona kids have lost autism therapy

HOWARD FISCHER
Capitol Media Services

PHOENIX — A new lawsuit blames Arizona’s Medicaid program for about 1,000 children with autism spectrum disorder for losing the therapy they need.

The claim stems from decisions by two major health insurers who contract with the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System to terminate their own contracts with two special programs for children with autism. That, according to the lawsuit, has resulted in these children being in danger of regressing and returning to behavior patterns from before they started getting treatment.

What makes the state’s Medicaid program liable, according to attorney Tim Nelson, is that AHCCCS approved the action by Mercy Care and Arizona Complete Health.

All that stems from a dispute between the insurers and Action Behavior Centers and Centria Health, both of which provide specialized treatment for children with autism spectrum disorder, about reimbursement rates. That ultimately resulted in the insurers canceling the contracts and informing parents they will need to find somewhere else for the care.


The problem, Nelson said, is that the insurers — paid by AHCCCS to provide this coverage — have not made other comparable treatment readily available, with long waiting lists.

Nelson said the rules for AHCCCS mandate continued provision of behavioral health services “according to the needs of the person” — but no longer than 45 days after the need is identified.

“Many providers’ waitlists far exceed those limits,” he told the court.

All that, he said, has left the children without the care their parents say they need.

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