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Arizona Daily Star

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SPECIAL INVESTIGATION INSIDE ICE DETENTION

GRANDMOTHER LANGUISHES 9 MONTHS IN DETENTION

A growing number of elderly or disabled immigrants are being held in U.S. immigration facilities

EMILY BREGEL | Arizona Daily Star

A mong detainees at Eloy Detention Center, 79-year-old Julia Benitez is known as "la abuela," the grandmother in Spanish. The Cuban asylum seeker was only having occasional memory lapses when she first surrendered to U.S. border agents last year, after crossing the southern border near Lukeville, Arizona, her family says. Julia was sent to Eloy, about 50 miles northwest of Tucson, in May 2025. But after nine months detained in an unfamiliar setting, without individualized attention or care, Julia's early-stage dementia

has progressed to the point that she doesn't know where she is, said her daughter, Dayana Cosme Benitez, a lawful permanent resident who lives in Miami with her two sons. Sometimes in video calls, Julia appears happy "to the point of tears" to see her daughter. But in other conversations, Julia is confused about who Dayana is, mistaking her for her mother instead of her daughter, and talks as if she's still in Cuba, said Dayana, who is 46. Mostly, "she just keeps asking when she's going to be released," Dayana said, speaking in Spanish.

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Cuban asylum seeker Julia Benitez is pictured last year in Mexico, then 78 years old, two days before crossing the U.S.-Mexico border near Lukeville, Arizona to request asylum from border agents. COURTESY OF DAYANA COSME BENITEZ

MORE INSIDE: Tucson asylum seeker detained for weeks, Page B1

Raid, but no arrest in Guthrie case yet

ARIZONA DAILY STAR No one was arrested after law enforcement agencies swarmed a Catalina Foothills neighborhood about two miles from Nancy Guthrie's home Friday night in the ongoing search for the missing 84-year-old woman, reports say. A SWAT team and vehicles from the Pima County Sheriff's Department, the FBI and Oro Valley, Marana and Sahuarita police departments converged on the area near East Orange Grove Road and North First Avenue just before 9 p.m. Friday. A county forensics vehicle was also part of a parade of law enforcement vehicles that passed through the roadblock. The scene was cleared overnight. Deputies and FBI agents also tagged and towed a Range Rover SUV from the parking lot of a fast-food restaurant on North Stone Avenue at East River Road. The Pima County Sheriff's Department confirmed the rush of activity Friday night was part of the Guthrie investigation. But it said the FBI requested it not release further information. On Saturday, Angelica Carrillo, a spokeswoman for the Sheriff's Department, told The Arizona Republic that investigators were following up on a lead that led to no arrests. It is the second time in four days that a significant operation in the investigation ended without an arrest. On Tuesday, the department detained a Rio Rico man for hours in connection with the case. However, he was later released and said in interviews afterward that he had no idea how he had been linked to the disappearance.

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About the series: Inside ICE Detention

As the detention of noncriminal immigrants soars to record highs under Trump, the Arizona Daily Star and Lee Enterprises are investigating the safety and well-being of those caught in the administration's widening mass-detention net. Immigrants with no criminal history, or who have already served their time for previous violations, are being locked up without access to bond, subjected to poor conditions, sent to solitary confinement, and deprived of adequate, timely health care, advocates say. The investigative team has interviewed more than 20 detainees so far, and will share stories about the conditions they face in detention in our ongoing series: "Inside ICE Detention."

INSIDE: Trump policies fuel detention profits, industry expansion. Page A13

AZ parks brace as wildflowers show up early

HENRY BREAN Arizona Daily Star

If the 3-foot wall of weeds in your neighbor's yard wasn't enough of a clue, experts are predicting an early and impressive wildflower display across parts of Southern Arizona. Unusually warm and wet conditions through the fall and winter have prompted

annual plants to sprout and blossom weeks ahead of time in some places, while the usual hotspots for flowers are bracing for a coming surge of bloom chasers. Picacho Peak State Park is already calling in reinforcements to help with the expected crowds. "Right now we are anticipating a good wildflower season, and when it is good,

Picacho Peak does need additional volunteers to help out," said Michelle Thompson, spokeswoman for Arizona State Parks and Trails. "We have put out an internal call for rangers from other parks who have the capacity to travel and be away from their home park to come help at Picacho." The park on Interstate 10, about 40

miles northwest of Tucson, is also providing regular wildflower updates on its website, complete with a new meter called "Bloomdar" that was pegged on "Starting to bloom" as of Tuesday. Past wildflower events at Picacho have led to parking problems and long lines at

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