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OP-ED

## **Immigrants sent across the river sometimes never come back**

New Yorkers rounded up by ICE are rotting in New Jersey jails. Some die

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This past spring, Carlos Mejia-Bonilla was arrested by federal immigration agents at his job on a construction site. It was a case of mistaken identity, but he was nonetheless taken into Immigration and Customs Enforcement's custody and detained at Hudson County Correctional Facility in New Jersey.

Come June, Carlos was dead.

Before his death, Carlos complained to family members about substandard jail conditions and lack of attentive medical care. Carlos suffered from diabetes, anemia, and cirrhosis of the liver, and worried that treatment for his issues was not a priority for the facility staff.

Unfortunately, his concerns were just.

What happened to Carlos is not an isolated incident, but part of a growing set of problems at ICE jails in Hudson and Bergen counties, New Jersey, and Orange County, New York.

Watchdog organizations and local advocacy groups have issued damning reports highlighting systemic and long-running issues of medical neglect at these facilities. The latest report comes from New York Lawyers for the Public Interest in February 2017, which highlighted recurrent and serious deficiencies in medical care including lengthy delays in receiving medical attention, denial of requests for off-site specialized care, inadequate treatment for acute pain, denial of adequate exercise and nutrition, and other potentially fatal omissions.

NYLPI's findings comport with the experiences many of our clients suffer daily under ICE's custody.

For example, one Legal Aid Society client was detained by ICE at Hudson County last November and missed an essential biopsy scheduled for the following day. The client had previously shown elevated levels of prostate-specific antigen which could indicate early signs of prostate cancer. His attorney had been advocating for a biopsy to be done after being retained in January. However, this important procedure did not

occur until more than eight months after he was detained by ICE, heightening the risk to his health.

Another client at Bergen County faced serious risk of losing several of his toes because of inadequate treatment for his diabetes. Despite his feet becoming more and more grotesquely infected, ICE repeatedly denied him release, claiming that his medical needs were being met. At a bond hearing, a judge reacted to the client's condition by setting an affordable bail to allow him to secure needed care. The judge also stated that this was the third man he had seen with complications from untreated diabetes while in ICE detention.

These are only a few examples, but we hear similar horror stories from clients detained in county jails under ICE's custody around the tri-state area.

What we don't hear are calls from New York City elected officials—who are usually very committed and outspoken on immigration and criminal justice reform issues in New York—raising awareness about what is occurring just right across the Hudson River.

And the reality is, the majority of ICE detainees kept at Hudson, Bergen and Orange county jails are New Yorkers. They are arrested by ICE in New York City, then sent to these facilities to await their fate.

They immigrated here from their native countries, established lives here, and still have families here in the five boroughs.

No one should have to languish under cruel, life-threatening conditions without appropriate medical care to meet their individual needs, regardless of the charges against them.

Our city's elected officials have been right and quick to call out the daily injustices at Rikers Island. What our clients and their fellow New Yorkers are suffering at Hudson and other facilities is just as appalling, and worthy of that same spotlight and attention.

As defenders, our advocacy does not stop for clients when they are sent to a corrections facility outside of New York City. The same duty of care should extend to elected officials when their constituents are taken from local districts and detained at one of these deplorable ICE facilities.

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