



Immigrant Rights Organizations Submit FOIA Request Seeking Information on “Batavia” NY Detention Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW YORK—Today, on behalf of Justice for Migrant Families Western New York, Prisoners’ Legal Services of New York, and Rapid Defense Network (RDN), Justice Action Center, RDN, and pro bono counsel Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe LLP submitted a [Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) request](#) with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for records on its policies and practices at the Buffalo Service Processing Center, known as “Batavia”—the largest immigration detention center in New York State. The facility has gained notoriety among advocates for its egregious conditions of confinement, lack of transparency, and release practices, with outcomes of serious injury and even death.

ICE policies and practices at Batavia are so opaque that advocates and attorneys who work with detained people there refer to it as a “black box”. One person, Elias*, who was detained at Batavia for three years described being “threatened with ‘la hielera’ for speaking to outside groups.” Other examples of alarming ICE practices at Batavia in direct contradiction to their own standards include arbitrary and retaliatory use of solitary confinement, physical and verbal abuse by officials, racial discrimination, lack of accommodations for disabled people, and medical neglect.

Last winter 2021, ICE was releasing migrants from Batavia without warning at a remote gas station, often late at night, lacking winter-appropriate clothing, funds for travel, or any assistance in finding shelter or reuniting with family. What’s more, people are released under these dangerous conditions while in need of medical attention that was denied to them at Batavia.

A man named Pierre with severe mental and physical disabilities was found dead in the street shortly after being released from Batavia at a rural gas station. Despite months of advocacy and repeated requests by Justice for Migrant Families, ICE refused to provide a release date or any accommodations for Pierre’s disabilities in order to facilitate Pierre’s safe release.

As explained in the FOIA, people detained at Batavia describe several alarming practices that violate statutory and constitutional obligations, in addition to ICE’s own [standards](#). Daniel*, another formerly detained person at Batavia, explains the culture of retaliation among officials at Batavia: “The conditions at Batavia detention center are utterly unacceptable. You don’t have

any basic human rights, and if you try to stand up for yourself, you're labeled a troublemaker and transferred to another facility. It was really like living in a nightmare day after day. People really need to know what is going on inside Batavia because the public only hears what ICE says."

"As documented in our FOIA request, ICE has a culture of dehumanizing folks simply because they have a different immigration status, native language, or skin color," said Anna Porter, Community Outreach Coordinator at Justice for Migrant Families Western New York. "Despite being the perpetrator of harm, ICE works to suppress these immigrant experiences, invalidating the real trauma that people face while in detention. We hope that this FOIA brings to light the mistreatment that has been covered up for too long. With the power of information, we can uplift the voice of people whose experiences have been put down and work together to challenge the practice of immigration detention."

"We request this information from ICE because it is our mission to safeguard and defend the statutory and constitutional rights of detained people," said John Peng, Immigration Federal Litigation and Appellate Staff Attorney at Prisoners' Legal Services of New York. "Transparency and accountability within government agencies, especially agencies such as ICE where so much happens behind the closed doors of detention facilities, is absolutely critical if we are to ensure that our clients' rights are protected and enforced."

The filing of this request coincides with an action being organized by Justice for Migrant Families to be held outside the ICE Buffalo Field Office located at 250 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY at 4pm today raise awareness around ICE's deadly practices.

Read the full [FOIA request here](#).

**Note: Pseudonyms were used to protect identities.*

An earlier version of this press release included an incorrect quote for John Peng. The quote has been corrected.

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Contact: Tasha Moro; 323-450-7269; tasha.moro@justiceactioncenter.org