



Update on Stewart Detention Center and Recommendations

Current conditions in Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, GA

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the medical neglect and abuse that had already been well-documented in Stewart Detention Center (SDC). According to reports of detained individuals and the observations of human rights defenders, medical care has been dangerously substandard inside SDC, and the detention conditions have led to poor mental health. After the publication of multiple reports by human rights defenders, government agencies, and journalists, Stewart Detention Center still detained thousands of immigrants without ever addressing the documented constitutional violations when the pandemic began.

In March and April 2020, the first months of wide Covid-19 spread in the United States, El Refugio's and Freedom for Immigrant's detention hotlines received an unprecedented number of calls. Those detained at SDC reported overcrowded conditions, the inability to follow social distancing guidelines, extremely limited access to personal protective equipment, and fear of becoming infected. Hotline volunteers logged call after call reporting that SDC staff did not isolate newly admitted individuals, those with symptoms, or people with close contact to positive Covid-19 cases. High risk individuals were held in units with as many as seventy and eighty others. Detained individuals shared their fear of being sent to "el pozo," or the hole; medical isolation was indistinguishable from solitary confinement. Then letters began to arrive to El Refugio documenting the same kinds of conditions and reinforcing patterns of fear, anxiety, and the worry that detained individuals would not make it out of SDC alive. These reports have continued into 2021.

The global health crisis shines a spotlight on what we already knew about Stewart Detention Center: medical neglect and abuse and the arbitrary use of solitary confinement put immigrants at risk for disastrous health outcomes in detention. After over a decade of documented abuse and eight deaths of detained individuals in SDC since 2017, urgent action must happen now.

From the Executive Summary of *Cage of Fear, Medical Neglect and Abuse in Stewart Detention Center*, a report prepared by El Refugio and released on May 11, 2021.

Recommendations to President Biden & Department of Homeland Security:

1. Release all detained immigrants from Detention Centers nationwide.
2. Close all detention centers.
3. The Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security must immediately investigate medical practices, Covid-19 protocols, denial of release, and retaliation.
4. ***Until all detention centers are closed, we recommend the following:***
 - Release all detained people at high risk for severe illness from Covid-19.
 - End all use of solitary confinement.
 - Serve meals that meet the national nutritional standards and individual dietary needs.
 - Improve access to legal counsel via on-site meetings and video conferencing.

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- Pay at least the state minimum wage to detained workers and enforce all state fair labor standard work laws.
- Increase staffing of medical units to respond to all requests for care and treatment.
- Implement other Covid-19 safety protocols, including:
 - a. safe cohorting practices;
 - b. clean masks to all detained immigrants once a day;
 - c. sufficient hand soap and hand sanitizer and
 - d. increased cleaning staff and adjust protocols to adhere to CDC guidance.

Reports on Immigration Detention in Georgia

Cage of Fear, Medical Neglect and Abuse in Stewart Detention Center During the Covid-19 Pandemic, a report prepared by El Refugio (May 2021) <https://bit.ly/3hncWzg>

The formal complaint submitted to the DHS Office of Inspector General and the DHS Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties on the abuses at Irwin County Detention Center (September 14, 2020) <https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/OIG-ICDC-Complaint-1.pdf>

Imprisoned Justice: Inside Two Georgia Detention Centers (2017) provides a comprehensive report on detention conditions and violations at Irwin County and Stewart Detention Centers. https://projectsouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Imprisoned_Justice_Report-1.pdf

Links to Georgia Immigration Support Organizations

El Refugio <https://www.elrefugiostewart.org/>

Project South <https://projectsouth.org/>

Detention Watch Georgia <https://www.facebook.com/GeorgiaDetentionWatch/>

South Georgia Immigrant Support Network <https://www.facebook.com/sogaisnetwork/>

New Sanctuary Movement of Atlanta <https://www.facebook.com/NSMAgeorgia>

Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights <https://glahr.org/>

Casa Alternativa <https://www.facebook.com/casaalternativa/>

Paz Amigos <https://www.pazamigos.org/>