



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
March 24, 2023

**“Tortuous Conditions And Abusive Treatment”: Detained Immigrants Continue to Suffer Egregious Mistreatment, Medical Neglect, and Abuse in New York Jail**

*In the face of ongoing violations, seven immigrant rights groups filed a civil rights complaint against Orange County Correctional Facility in Goshen, N.Y.*

**Contact:** Daniel Ball, Brooklyn Defenders: [dball@bds.org](mailto:dball@bds.org)

**(Goshen, N.Y.)** - Seven immigrant rights organizations released [a civil rights complaint](#) filed with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) alleging [the mistreatment of immigrants](#) detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at Orange County Correctional Facility (OCCF) in Goshen, NY. The complaint alleges the denial of health care to immigrants with several physical and mental health conditions, arbitrary punishment, retaliation, and traumatizing strip searches. The complaint demands the release of all immigrants detained at OCCF. Pending their release, the complaint also demands a plan of action to remedy the facility’s continued medical neglect and abuse, flagrant food safety violations and nutritional shortcomings, as well as the pervasive culture of violence and impunity.

**Brooklyn Defender Services, Catholic Charities Community Services – Archdiocese of New York, Envision Freedom Fund, For the Many, Freedom for Immigrants, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, and NYU Law Immigrant Rights Clinic** filed the complaint based on the accounts of three individuals recently detained at OCCF. The complaint is the latest of a series of complaints documenting ongoing human rights abuses at OCCF, including public complaints filed against OCCF in [February](#) and [April](#) of 2022.

Immigrants with severe mental and physical health conditions were denied health care—in violation of OCCF and ICE’s own standards—exacerbating their existing conditions and causing new ones. "Being detained and not being able to receive the medical care I needed for my mental health made me feel vulnerable because I couldn’t do anything about it. Witnessing the lack of medical attention we received was worse because they made us feel like we didn’t matter. People

need to realize that we do have feelings, that we do hurt. I'm upset that until this day detained people are still not receiving the care that they need. I know how scary it can be when you think you're alone and no one is there to help you. I beg everyone to help end immigration detention and free everyone," said **Ms. Q**, a longtime New York resident who was recently released from OCCF earlier this month.

OCCF deprived Ms. Q of access to the psychiatric treatment and therapy for PTSD that she had been receiving as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse prior to her detention. Her recent experience at OCCF was particularly traumatizing because ICE had previously fractured her ankle and denied her medical care for her ankle at Rensselaer County Jail in 2021, and then redetained her at OCCF in 2022 after she continued to speak out about her mistreatment. "The cycle of abuse and retaliation in Ms. Q's case demonstrates the pressing need to end immigration detention," said **Alina Das, Co-Director of the NYU Immigrant Rights Clinic**.

**Ms. G** suffered a head injury in federal custody and began suffering intense and persistent headaches. At OCCF, she was prescribed medication but the information related to the medication and its purpose was not explained in a language or a manner Ms. G could understand. In response to Ms. G's written request for medical attention, she was told to stop putting in so many requests since there were not enough staff members to attend to her needs. She explains that "this made me feel like I was nothing, that I had no value. This made me feel bad."

At some point, OCCF gave her the wrong medication, to which she had strong aversive reactions. Ms. G was later punished for possessing the very pills that the facility incorrectly provided her. **Ms. G explains** that this "made me feel horrible. They had told me the pills they were giving me were only for headaches, not for diabetes or high blood pressure. If I have diabetes, I do not know, they have not informed me of that."

**Mr. D**, who was originally detained at Hudson County Jail (HCJ) and then transferred to OCCF, began experiencing vision loss during detention. Following months of advocacy for medical care and the severe degradation of his vision, he was diagnosed with a brain cyst. Mr. D was not informed of his condition for a further two weeks after the initial diagnosis and is being denied surgical intervention. "I was horrified. I don't know what it is. I don't even know if it's cancer. My aunts and uncles and people in my family have died of cancer. It's so frustrating that I am sitting here and can't do anything," said **Mr. D**. The government has announced its intent to deport Mr. D in the midst of his health problems, contrary to its usual policy of not deporting people with cases in Mr. D's legal posture.

OCCF guards have also subjected detained women to invasive, traumatic, and humiliating strip searches in violation of ICE's own standards. Without individualized reasonable suspicion, OCCF guards have conducted multiple unit-wide strip searches. Detained immigrants have also been served unsafe food. Mr. D, who worked in the kitchen at OCCF, alerted other detained people that the facility was serving rotten, expired food. Immigrants had to rely on expensive, pre-packaged food purchased with their commissary funds.

"Immigration detention threatens people's health, safety, and human rights, and these abuses are perpetuated in our state at OCCF," said **Ellen Pachnanda, Director of Brooklyn Defenders' Immigration Practice**. "Our clients and other immigrants detained at OCCF

continue to be subjected to inadequate access to medical care and nutrition, harsh punishment and retaliation, and other dangerous conditions at the hands of a system that incarcerates people because of where they were born. With this complaint, we demand that OCCF be held accountable, and above all, renew our call to release all immigrants in ICE detention.”

“The bravery it takes for people detained by ICE to speak out—at great personal risk—against the horrible conditions and treatment they endure should not be underestimated. ICE has a well-documented history of the kind of abuse described by immigrants jailed at OCCF, a New York county jail, and we cannot tolerate it. New York must step up to demonstrate that we value human dignity above all and commit to ending the state's participation in ICE detention,” **said Tania Mattos, the director of advocacy and policy at Envision Freedom Freedom.**

In addition to continuing to call on DHS to immediately address the abuses at OCCF, the immigrant rights groups call on the New York State legislature to pass the [Dignity Not Detention Act](#). “A year after our original complaints, the torturous conditions and abusive treatment of detained immigrants at OCCF continue,” **said Cynthia Marlene Galaz, Senior Policy Associate with Freedom for Immigrants.** “It’s clear that the only way to protect our communities in New York from this pattern of abuse is ensuring that the state is out of the business of detaining immigrants. All people are deserving of justice and dignity, which is why we demand everyone at OCCF be released back to the safety of their families and communities.”

“We must advocate for the release of those detained in ICE custody. Detention is detrimental to people’s medical and psychological health and, as a physician, I am deeply concerned for the well-being and health of the thousands of immigrants suffering in detention,” **explained Dr. Kate Sugarman, board certified family medicine physician and Steering Committee member of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest’s volunteer Medical Providers Network.** “Detention centers undermine public safety, and it is imperative that we call for the end of ICE's contract with OCCF.”

###