



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Oversight of ICE Detention Facilities: Is DHS Doing Enough?

September 26, 2019

In recent years, the number of people in ICE custody has been steadily rising and now exceeds 50,000. Too often, ICE turns a blind eye to the conditions at its facilities. Indeed, several recent reports have shone a light on deplorable conditions at facilities holding migrants in ICE custody. For example, in California, at the Adelanto ICE Processing Center, an unannounced inspection by the Office of Inspection General (OIG) found a number of disturbing conditions, including: nooses hanging in several detainee cells, a detainee never leaving his wheelchair for sleep or to brush his teeth for nine days, and detainees waiting months for basic medical treatment.

In New Jersey, at the Essex County Correctional Facility, the OIG found that cafeteria workers were serving visibly moldy and foul smelling food to migrant detainees resulting in likely food poisoning. How, one might ask, did these blatant violations of detention standards and, for that matter, human decency, continue under ICE's watch? ICE has processes in place to conduct oversight of these facilities, but the OIG has found, they have been insufficient to ensure compliance with ICE's own standards. Contracted inspectors are stretched too thin and are missing obvious deficiencies during inspections.

Even when deficiencies are identified, many are left uncorrected or the standards themselves are waived. This is unacceptable. While I am encouraged by the work that the OIG is doing to identify and correct deficiencies at ICE detention facilities, the OIG faces constraints in conducting oversight work in a meaningful manner. I recently heard from the newly confirmed DHS Inspector General that the OIG currently lacks the ability to evaluate certain detention standards absent subject matter experts on staff. The OIG has described the beginnings of a plan to contract with subject matter experts who could engage in this work, and I hope to hear that this plan is being put into action. I also look forward to hearing more from OIG's witness about the steps ICE must take to ensure its detention facilities comply with its own detention standards.

In closing, I would like to take a moment to share my concern regarding the resistance this Subcommittee has faced in conducting oversight on these important issues. While I am pleased that they are here today, the Nakamoto Group has refused several attempts by the Committee to engage through meetings or briefings about its work. I would like to remind everyone that ICE pays its contractors, including Nakamoto, with taxpayer dollars. As Congress, it is our responsibility to conduct oversight to ensure they are being spent wisely. Unfortunately, it was only under threat of subpoena that the Nakamoto Group agreed to testify today. I also share Chairwoman Torres Small's disappointment regarding the Department's unwillingness to sit on this panel with its own contractor, Nakamoto.

What does it say about the Department or its contractor that they refuse to have a seat at the table together and discuss these important issues? Such behavior shows a complete lack of respect for Congress and its oversight responsibilities as well as a disregard for the spirit of bipartisan problem-solving that the Chairwoman fosters on this Subcommittee. I hope the Department takes the concerns raised here today seriously and acts on them promptly.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978