



**National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) Statement  
House Homeland Security Shadow Hearing  
The Ultimate Grift: How DHS Is Enriching the President and His Allies at Taxpayer  
Expense**

**March 25, 2026**

Thank you, Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson and members of this Committee for holding this important democratic issues forum. My name is Jesse Franzblau, and I serve as Associate Director of Policy for the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC).

For over four decades, NIJC has dedicated itself to ensuring human rights protections and access to justice for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Headquartered in Chicago, IL, NIJC provides direct legal services to approximately 10,000 low-income individuals each year and advocates on behalf of our immigrant communities through policy advocacy, impact litigation, and public education. NIJC serves people throughout the country, with a focus on the Midwest region, facing rampant rights violations by federal immigration enforcement agents and inhumane conditions in immigration detention.

Today, I would like to address critical issues facing our communities across the country as it relates to the expansion of the immigration detention system, notably: 1) The opaque contract scheme the administration is using to expand the mass detention apparatus to warehouses, 2) The inhumane conditions leading to record-breaking deaths that will worsen dramatically with the use of warehouses, and 3) The inflated budget for immigration detention that has led to this crisis point. These issues impact communities across the country, are part of a dramatic overreach of executive authority and a serious threat to democratic institutions.

**1) Immigration detention contract schemes bypass open and competitive procurement**

The immigration detention system is [expanding](#) at an alarming rate while mired in secrecy. Government contracting typically involves federal agencies identifying needs, posting solicitations, evaluating proposals based on cost and capability, and awarding contracts. The contracting for immigration detention facilities, however, has often [circumvented](#) the regular process in which contractors respond to requests for proposals, and compete against one another based on price, expertise, and services they provide. In expanding the immigration detention system, ICE is increasingly relying on sole-source contracts and procurement procedures outside of DHS that circumvent the basic transparency requirements, waste taxpayer dollars, and bypass local opposition to the expansion plans.

ICE took advantage of the White House's declaration of a border emergency in January 2025 to largely stop using [competitive processes](#) and [award](#) no-bid contracts to massive private prison [contractors CoreCivic and GEO Group](#). ICE expanded existing detention contracts, such as for the [Delaney Hall Facility](#) in Newark, New Jersey, and the [Dilley Immigration Processing Center](#) in Texas, to hold families. ICE awarded CoreCivic a [no-bid contract](#) to reactivate a shuttered 1,033-bed [former federal prison](#) in Leavenworth, Kansas, and the GEO Group run 1,800 bed prison in [North Lake, Michigan](#).

The cost of these rushed no-bid contracts to taxpayers is enormous. While ICE [claimed](#) it “does not have time for the competitive process to be completed,” the agency awarded CoreCivic a contract in Kansas that would yield the private prison company \$4.2 million per month alone. CoreCivic, in turn, [told](#) its shareholders with glee that “Never in our 42-year company history have we had so much activity and demand for our services as we are seeing right now.”

The expansion to warehouses is taking place even further outside the regular procurement process, with the administration buying real-estate directly outside of [federal land acquisition procedures](#) and using non-DHS contracting vehicles to award new contracts in ways that raise serious concern. The administration's “ICE Detention Reengineering Initiative” plans to [spend \\$38.3 billion](#) to boost detention capacity to 92,600 beds by purchasing warehouses to turn into mass detention facilities. In January 2026, ICE purchased two [warehouses](#), paying over \$100 million for a site in Maryland, and more than \$70 million for another in Arizona. In February, the agency paid approximately \$87 million for a [warehouse](#) in Pennsylvania. The agency paid \$123 million for an [826,000-square-foot warehouse](#) near El Paso, Texas. As of early March, the government had purchased at least 10 warehouses. The agency is seeking to bring 24 proposed facilities online by October.

DHS is using a Navy Supply Systems Command contracting procurement system to bypass the normal bidding process involved in most federal contracting. The procurement process is called WEXMAC TITUS, the Worldwide Expeditionary Multiple Award Contract for Territorial Integrity of the United States. This had primarily been used for international contracting to quickly award task orders. Under the WEXMAX process, DHS can use “pre-qualified” companies without going through the normal bidding process. The Trump administration has added the private prison giant [GEO Group to the WEXMAC-TITUS list](#) of pre-qualified vendors, along with [several other companies](#). For these companies, this means guaranteed access to compete for ICE work worth potentially billions of dollars.

Failing to follow the competitive contracting process and bypass open procurement requirements is costly for taxpayers. The lack of transparency about the plans for mass detention sites has also led to widespread bipartisan backlash to the facilities. Experts point out that federal [land acquisition procedures](#) typically involve coordination with local officials and an extensive review

process. But in many cases, elected officials say they learned of the plans only after the government finalized real estate deals. Much of the opposition to these [warehouses](#) is based on the impact to municipal services, including water and sewage systems. In February, Maryland's attorney general filed a [lawsuit](#) seeking to block a detention facility in that state. The [lawsuit](#) accuses ICE of keeping the community "in the dark" about the facility it paid \$102.4 million for and said the agency failed to perform a "required environmental review." The lawsuit blocked the Maryland warehouse construction, but this is likely temporary.

The administration continues to push forward the warehouse detention plan, even as local opposition from elected officials and community members worked to stop a number of deals, and the average daily population in detention has [declined](#) in recent months.

## **2) Immigration detention expansion is a human rights crisis**

Given the track record of inhumane [conditions](#) in ICE detention and lack of oversight mechanisms, the expansion of the detention apparatus to warehouses will drastically exacerbate the human pain and suffering. The detention expansion has had deadly consequences. [2025 was the deadliest year](#) in two decades for people in ICE detention, and this year is poised to surpass this grim record with 13 people already announced dead since January 2026. The Trump administration's evisceration of basic [oversight mechanisms](#) also largely strips away the ability to monitor human rights abuses and prevent them from continuing.

The increasing number of deaths in ICE custody without accountability raise concerns regarding the treatment and conditions that people are subject to within ICE detention facilities. Local investigators are looking at at least one death in Camp East Montana as a "[likely homicide](#)" at the hands of detention guards. There has also been a serious decline in [inspection](#) reports, as compared to recent years, illustrating a drop in interest in cursory [inspections](#) to assess whether facilities meet a range of detention standards, and correct violations when they occur.

There is no way to use warehouses to detain human beings in a matter that respects basic human rights standards. [Experts warn](#) that meeting detention standards will be nearly [impossible](#). These [warehouses](#) do not have the ventilation, temperature control, plumbing, or sanitation systems necessary for human care, and will only exacerbate the inhumane conditions seen in other ICE facilities, including deaths in custody, assaults, and infectious disease outbreaks.

## **3) The inflated budget windfall that led to this crisis point**

ICE and CBP have used the annual DHS [appropriations process](#) over the years to dramatically increase their [budgets](#) for detention, as well as militarized enforcement, widespread surveillance, and deportations without due process. Congress increased ICE's annual budget from \$3.4 billion in 2004 to \$9.2 billion in 2024. CBP's budget increased from \$4.9 to \$20 billion over the same

two decades. In July 2025, Congress gave these agencies historic additional funding through the [reconciliation process](#) (“One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” or OBBBA), providing \$75 billion for ICE alone, and \$64 billion for CBP. The administration has used this windfall of money, available through 2029, to supercharge ICE and CBP’s Border Patrol operations and incarcerate more people than ever before. The funding for detention expansion has also come at the expense of funding for Americans’ access to healthcare and food security, affordable housing, education, and other critical services.

The primary beneficiaries of this wasteful spending are the private prison, military and security contractors. The current [Attorney General](#) is a former lobbyist for the private prison company [GEO Group](#), which donated [over a million dollars](#) alone to Trump’s reelection. David Venturella, an ICE advisor currently overseeing an ICE division that manages detention center contracts, is a former [GEO Group executive](#). Tom Homan, the White House “border tsar” was a paid consultant for GEO Group, and also played a role in the [DHS hiring](#) of Venturella. During earnings calls, both GEO Group and CoreCivic executives discuss the rapid expansion of their facilities as a [significant growth opportunity](#), and have posted record revenue in 2025. The companies profiting off detention also have long track records of [regulatory violations and legal settlements](#) even as they continue to receive new and more expensive federal contracts.

Using their profits, private prison companies like GEO Group spend millions to [influence government spending](#) and immigration enforcement policies. This lobbying often focuses on Congressional funding bills that set the level of funding for immigration detention. This dynamic leads to a gross private incentivization to detain more immigrants, where the profit motive is proven to result in cutting corners that put lives at risk

It is imperative for Congress to take measures to restrict funding for any new ICE detention contracts, place safeguards to prevent any new contract awards without undergoing strict reporting requirements as a step toward scaling down funding for mass immigration detention and deportations. Congress must appropriate tax dollars into health care and vital public services and stop lining the pockets of CEOs who profit from DHS private prison and this mass warehouse expansion plan.

Congress can also take action by requiring DHS to comply with local land use and zoning regulations at future detention sites, via standalone legislation or included as a provision to restrict funding for any new detention contracts in the DHS FY26 appropriations bill. It is also important to place restrictions on any new or extended contracts until certain conditions are met, including written notification to Congress that provide justifications for the increased bedspace, estimated cost to the agency, independent assessment and environmental review, consultation with impacted communities, and standards used for the facility that ensure regular inspections and compliance measures.

Lastly, it is important to take steps to rescind OBBBA reconciliation funding dedicated to detention capacity and redirect it towards local communities for the creation of new housing, hospitals, and other basic human needs.

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