

# Advocates Express Support For Bill That Aims To Improve Access, Quality Of Health Care To Detained Immigrants

Main Category: Public Health

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A small group of clergy members and immigrant advocates on Thursday called for the passage of a bill (S 3005) that would require the Department of Homeland Security to adopt policies and procedures to ensure access to health care for detained immigrants, the Newark Star-Ledger reports.

The bill also would require DHS to report all deaths to Congress and the department's Office of Inspector General. Another provision in the bill would ensure that detainees with chronic health conditions have access to medications (Larini, Newark Star-Ledger, 6/20).

The legislation comes partly in response to a four-part Washington Post series published in May that examined the "broken system of care" in detention centers for foreigners awaiting deportation. The articles revealed that 83 detainees had died in detention centers since the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency was created five years ago.

At a recent House Judiciary Immigration Subcommittee hearing, Julie Myers, assistant secretary of the ICE bureau at DHS, said that the agency focuses on emergency care and that other medical conditions are assessed and evaluated by physicians accordingly through the Department of Immigrant Health Services Managed Care Program (Kaiser Health Disparities Report, 6/18).

Shai Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, said the bill would "ensure that doctors make the appropriate decisions, not bureaucrats within the detention system." According to the Star-Ledger, under the current policy, off-site staff can overrule decisions by on-site staff at detention facilities and those decisions do not have to be reviewed (Newark Star-Ledger, 6/20).

Goldstein was part of the group of about 25 advocates who gathered in support of the bill. He said, "The lack of federal immigration reform has contributed to the death of these detainees," adding, "That is unacceptable and un-American" (Llorente, Bergen Record, 6/19).

Harold Ort, an ICE spokesperson, said, "We strive to maintain safe, secure and humane conditions in all of our facilities," adding, "If folks are saying our medical care is not good, it's not right because we're giving very good care. We take this very seriously" (Newark Star-Ledger, 6/20).

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