

Stories of
ICE's Violence
at ICA-Farmville

SHUT IT DOWN!

La ColectiVA

INTRODUCTION

Since 2017,

La ColectiVA has been organizing to fight for liberation and against the violence of Virginia's incarceration and deportation pipeline. La ColectiVA supports the leadership of folks with direct experience in detention by organizing with people currently and previously detained at ICA-Farmville and other facilities. This work has led to the development of this project that details the firsthand accounts of people who have dealt with brutality, abuse, and neglect at ICA-Farmville. People who have provided these accounts were detained at ICA-Farmville at different times ranging from 2015 to 2020.

This project centers the experiences of people who have been detained at ICA-Farmville, their families, and loved ones. Through it, we hope to shed light on the harms done by ICE detention in Virginia and its contractor Immigration Centers of America, and to make clear the solution to this violence - ending incarceration and deportations.

ICA-Farmville is the largest ICE detention center in the mid-Atlantic region with a capacity of over 700 people. Operated by the private prison company, Immigration Centers of America, ICA-Farmville rakes in millions of

dollars through an Intergovernmental Service Agreement with ICE and the Town of Farmville. The contract maintains a “guaranteed minimum” provision which further incentivizes ICE to detain people through raids and constant collaboration with local and state police agencies. As documents obtained by the National Immigrant Justice Center show, “Initially, ICE established a per diem of \$79.89 per individual detained in Farmville. Over time, ICA Farmville’s per diem rate jumped to a base rate of \$120.75 per day per person jailed, with incremental increases for every additional person held over 500.”¹

Guaranteed minimums require ICE to pay contractors for a minimum number of detention beds regardless of how many people are detained. This means that contractors receive a set payment for a minimum number of detention beds even if some of the detention beds are empty.²

These financial incentives are part of a corrupt system designed to cage and punish people under the guise of public safety.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1** Everyone detained at ICA-Farmville and all Virginia facilities must be released.
- 2** ICA-Farmville and all components of the Virginia incarceration and deportation pipeline must be shut down.
- 3** Farmville town officials should end their agreement with ICE and ICA, terminating the contract to detain people in their town.
- 4** The attempted expansion of ICA's operations in Virginia and other states (including Illinois, Maryland and Michigan) must be stopped.
- 5** Congress must defund and abolish ICE and CBP.
- 6** Police must be defunded and abolished.
- 7** Public funds must be invested in community needs like healthcare, education, and housing.

STORIES



ALEX

My name is Alex and I experienced being detained at ICA Farmville the first time for almost 12 months in 2015 and for about 1 month more recently.

My experience in Farmville Detention Center was very bad with the officers, chief commanders, and guards. The staff maintains a negative environment, and they often say inappropriate words, make racist comments, and have abusive behavior towards the people detained. Every time the food arrives, there are many people that do not have the money to buy commissary. The ICA guards or chief commanders come and slap food out of people's hands like animals so that they stay hungry. They say this will "help motivate people not to come back anymore." The guards always are laughing and mocking the detainees regarding

their physical, mental, and emotional situation. When it is time for a visit, they always take you late and make comments and complaints about "illegal people" coming to visit the center, and suggesting that the families of detained people should be detained too. They make negative comments about our families. What affects someone the most psychologically is that after a visit, they

force you to get naked, show them your private parts, and inspect you with a lamp. This is inhuman and not a treatment anyone should be subjected to. Whenever you ask them for soap, shampoo, or other necessary items, the guards delay giving it to you and use it as an opportunity to make comments like "Go back to your country," or



other insults. Many fights that happen inside the detention center among those detained are instigated by the chief commanders because they do not maintain records about which people should stay together and who they should avoid putting together in the same dorm. There is overpopulation of people staying in the dorms, and due to the mass of people and the few resources (microwaves, televisions), fights begin and the guards often laugh when they see people hurting each other. Due to all of this, I suggest that the serious problems with security and safety inside of ICA Farmville should be exposed and that this facility must be permanently shut down.

The food provided inside of the center is very little, very poor quality, and usually poorly cooked. The food often has little rocks or hairs, has no flavor, and is a very, very small portion. Many stomach issues like vomiting, diarrhea, and pain are caused by the unhealthy conditions in the kitchen and processes for cooking the food. There is no visible hygiene or food safety processes. The food is often served cold. There are rumors from other detained people and health

staff that ICA violate people's rights by adding an unknown substance to the juice we drink which affects a man's virility. There are many people who suffer of hunger inside the detention center. Many are forced to supplement their diet with commissary food, which is highly overpriced and many people are from different countries with little or no resources, and no support from family members. There are also many people who are diabetic and since they do not have enough nutrition or the food given is not appropriate, they pass out. That is the only way they end up getting medical attention, once it is too late.

As we know, ICA is a private company that profits from holding people in detention, and is not concerned with the wellbeing of the people they detain or their financial situation. They exploit those detained by selling old, overpriced products like noodle soups that normally could be found for \$.20 outside which are sold for \$1.00. Many people cannot afford to buy commissary because it is so

Documents obtained by the Advancement Project revealed that on February 21, 2015, people in ICA-Farmville reported white worms in meals. This happened again on March 2, 2015.³

expensive, but the company does not care. They take advantage of our hunger after serving very small portions of badly-cooked food, to pressure people into buying their products. They also keep the air conditioning very cold inside the dorms, to force detained people to buy things like thermal long-sleeve shirts and extra socks, which are very overpriced compared to how much they cost outside. The phone calls are also very expensive, especially for many whose families live outside of the United States, because of how high they charge per minute for the calls.

The medical services and conditions inside the center are disastrous. The medical staff does not provide you the medication you want and need; they decide for you and

give you something else. The only way you get to go see the medical staff is if you are gravely ill, passing out, or dying. There are not enough doctors or nurses, and the staff lacks ethics in how they treat the detained people they are supposed to take care of. There is always racist treatment, and they are eager to maintain detained people practically sedated with lots of different types of pills, rather than actually treating their issues. Many times you can see that

the medical staff makes mistakes or touches people and different things without being extremely careful to sanitize their hands or equipment.

The rooms are not in an appropriately clean condition. The air conditioning units are extremely dusty and you can smell the dust and dirty air inside the dorm. This causes many people who are detained to have health and breathing problems, like coughing, and it can be dangerous for those who have asthma. When you have to use the toilet, there is no privacy or curtains, meaning detained people have to urinate and defecate in front of other people who are eating food or sleeping right nearby.

There is not direct communication with ICE officers when it comes to organizing court cases, which means the ICA staff has a big role when it comes to interfering

In September 2020, someone detained at ICA-Farmville submitted a letter to U.S. District Judge stating he “was admitted to the Armor Correctional Health Services Inc., at ICA-Farmville, and was transferred to outside hospital on July 14, 2020 and returned to the ICA-Farmville on July 28, 2020, there was close to die due to the negligence of the Directors of the Center.”⁴

with important things about immigration cases of detained people.

There is no appropriate processes at all in place for protecting and helping the mental health of people who are detained. There are many people who are lonely and depressed. Many people try to hurt themselves with blades or other items they have available, and there is no one to help. If the staff hears that someone who's detained is suffering, guards place them in solitary confinement, locking people up in a dark isolated room, which makes the issues even worse for the person. They do not offer treatments or help, they just sink people's pain even further.

Solitary confinement is internationally recognized as a form of torture and a painful practice commonly used by ICE.⁵

With the experiences I have shared, I hope this inspires people to understand that people's rights basically disappear when they enter the ICA-Farmville Detention Center in ICE's custody. Their main focus is filling beds in the dorms and earning money. Detainees are just a source of income for ICA. As someone who was previously detained at ICA-Farmville, I want to share my story about the suffering that I lived in Farmville. I can help speak up for those who cannot speak up while they are still being detained and still suffering racism, violence, mental abuse, oppression, poor health conditions, and hunger. I join the fight against detention, demanding that ICA-Farmville be shut down completely and that the expansion of ICA operations be stopped.

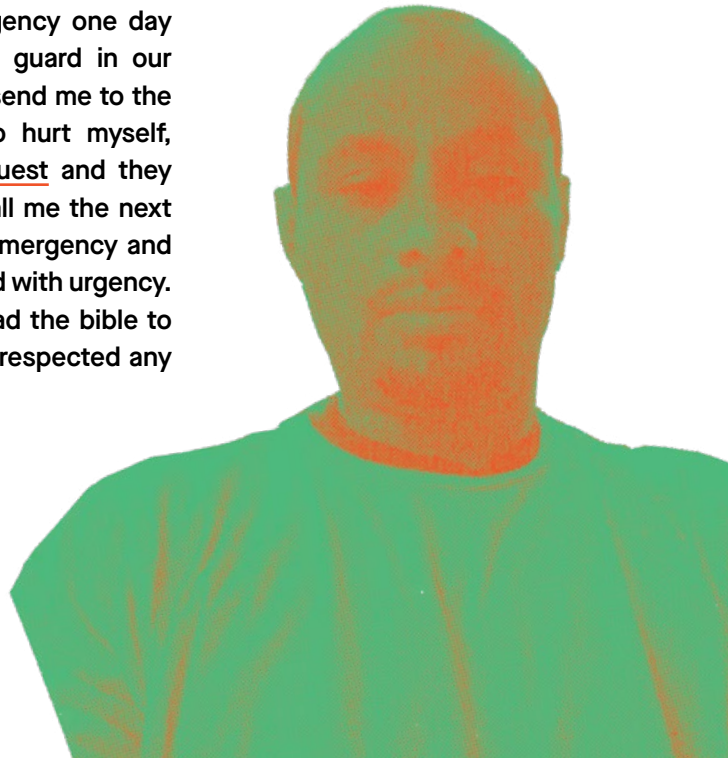
AUGUSTO

They [ICE/ICA] quarantined us so that we wouldn't receive visitors; they wanted to keep us isolated. I saw a lot of corruption from the workers and noticed racism in all the guards. The treatment they give in detention is very bad. The medical treatment is not very good.

I don't want to be there again and hope they don't open another detention center like those. I was there a little over a year. I worked in cleaning for almost nine months. I still can't get over the impact; what happened to me, to my family there. I had friends there that I hope will be able to contribute with how they felt there.

ICA charges immigration (ICE) to have us there. It seems they wanted to hold us there for money. There were people who had already signed deportation, talked to the judge, and they were still being held. People complained because they were being held there even though they were no longer fighting the case. I had a companion there who was over 85 years old, and they had him there for almost two months.

The medical care was not so good. I had an emergency one day and told the security guard in our block. I asked him to send me to the infirmary, I wanted to hurt myself, and I filled out a request and they told me they would call me the next day. I said it was an emergency and they still didn't respond with urgency. I vented, cried and read the bible to feel better. I never disrespected any officer.



Playing soccer, people would pass out. A man passed out and they only gave him a pill for pain – Tylenol – they did not give him more care. I think they ignored our needs and medical emergencies with the purpose of generating more profits.

One puts up with everything so as not to bring oneself more problems, so as not to make things worse. Many friends there were sent to the hole (solitary confinement), and there were people who only stayed there. I was in a straitjacket, like four days, three days in another occasion.

Documents obtained by the Advancement Project revealed that in January 2015, someone at ICA-Farmville was pepper-sprayed in medical isolation and in full restraints. He was then placed in handcuffs and leg shackles, stripped naked, and pepper sprayed twice. He was moved to a 4-point restraint bed where he was forced to remain for 2 days.⁷

Dawn Wooden, an ICE whistleblower, stated that requests for medical visits by detained people were often shredded.⁶

Many people screamed, they were taken out at night, chained everywhere. People suffered in the hole. Some people spent more time in the hole than on the block (dorm).

The food was not good; it was very bad. Sometimes they would give very little, so as to only give sustenance to keep us from dying, to maintain people. People preferred to buy from the commissary. Food was tough. Twice a week they gave chicken – Tuesdays and Fridays – the other days it was not enough. I lost 10 pounds in three months; I wanted to eat something, to eat more, but they did not allow it. The commissary was expensive, and so was the telephone. A Maruchan soup cost almost a dollar. A small bag of coffee was almost \$5. Less than ten small things to buy could be \$40–50.

The truth is there's not much I can add, only how difficult it is to be in detention, just for having wanted to migrate. To try to survive.

MARCELA Y GERÓNIMO



Hello, my name is Marcela, I will tell you a little about my story. I came to this country in 2014, together with my little boy who was then six years old. I applied for asylum at the border. I was in the detention center of Artesia, New Mexico, for approximately nine weeks. As you have likely heard, there is much cruelty that we migrants, children, women, men, the LGBT population face. At that time, I believed that only some of these groups were the most affected, but it was in 2018, in the morning hours, I received calls from an unknown number. After hearing the message, I immediately knew that I was reliving the nightmare... this time through my husband Gerónimo. He was detained in Prince William County, Virginia, as everyone knows, a quite anti-migrant county.

At first I did not know what to do, but I breathed and calmed myself, and I contacted members of La ColectiVA. Previously I had already had some contact with them. After leaving detention in 2014, I dedicated myself for a few years to energetically denounce the inhumane practices

Data shows that Northern Virginia jurisdictions have some of the highest compliance rates when receiving ICE detainer requests.⁸

in detention. I visited some detention centers (Berks) in Pennsylvania, visited Congress, did conferences with members of Catholic Charities, and specialists in psychology (focused

on how detention causes irreparable trauma). I was also in front of some senators, representatives of different pro-immigrant organizations, and the media, including articles, interviews with newspapers, and so on... I was immersed in the subject. And having been in a process is a reason that makes me continue to fight, so that our rights are respected. Until then, I was still very active, but I never imagined how difficult it would be to be in that situation again. This time with my young children, with an immigration process that continues to this day, without a family, I had to find ways to help my husband get out of that place, the children and I missed him. It was difficult but I had to work a double shift to be able to pay the expenses at home and to be able to help him while in detention. In May 2018, while it was my little boy's second birthday and I was working, my husband called to say he was on his way to Farmville Detention Center.

Fear took over me, I stood firm and encouraged him during that time, it was difficult to not know how to respond to my children when they asked about their father. When would he return? I was able to visit him once, it was a quick visit. I remember that one of the officers checked my documents and me to make sure I was not carrying prohibited objects. They took me to a room that was marked, the chairs were a meter apart. I couldn't hug him. The officer did not even allow us to touch our hands, it was forbidden. The next day I talked to him again and he said he didn't want me to go again. I remember that I felt really bad about that, because in addition to sensing he was depressed, he cried for the children, thinking that he would be deported and would not be with us again, among other things. Finally he was released on bond, he is still in a process in front of a judge, after this nothing has been the same.

After that he avoided talking about the subject, sometimes he commented to me that he had nightmares. He

seemed anxious, stressed. I have insisted that he needs psychological help, but he refuses to do it (at first I insisted a lot, because I know that these traumas harm us). In October 2018, I sought help with therapy up to now, and it has totally changed my life. Now I understand and stop pressuring him abruptly about seeking help. I know it is a process and not all human beings process things in the

same time frame. Sometimes he tells me that at ICA-Farmville the food was bad, often spoiled or raw, that the officers' treatment of those detained is racist, that they laugh at them while watching them. He and many of the people detained are not bilingual, and although they understand some of the insults they limit themselves to silence, some for fear of retaliation from the officers. When one of the detained people files a complaint

and reports abuse, it never reaches their superiors, as the guards have access to review them.

Recently, a conference was held among community members, and they offered me to take on the role of moderator (I discussed this with Geronimo), and in a conversation he confessed to me that the day I went to see him at Farmville, when he was returning to his dorm, they subjected him to a physical examination. They asked him to take off his clothes, including underwear so that he could squat (this was to make sure that he did not carry any illegal objects in his rectum) in front of other officers, and they commented and laughed among themselves, this was assuming that at some point I could give him something, which did not happen, because they did not even allow us to hold hands. At that moment it was inevitable to burst into tears, I understood the reason for his fear, shame. While commenting on this to other people, he has sometimes said that a psychologist has no reason to know about his life and traumas, that he does not need it. But I, as a patient, victim of emotional abuse among others, fully understand the trauma that this means for a man. In our Latin American society, we come from a machista culture,



emotional or psychological health does not exist on the list of priorities. If you go to a psychologist it is because you are in bad shape, and I lived it for years – I kept silent and re-victimized myself on too many occasions, so many that at some point I thought about suicide. Gerónimo has also expressed this to me. I live with the fear that this will happen, because I know that he needs help, but he refuses to accept that he has a problem and, more than that, to face his fears. That is why I am committed to the cause, and demand the release of people detained at the ICA-Farmville facility, and an end to the unsanitary conditions and lack of medical care for those who are detained, and in this global crisis their rights continue to be violated. It is an attack on their lives and their families, who suffer from the outside, disintegrated families, from traumas that, even if treated, will never disappear. The United States and its citizens are better than all this, which has become a million dollar business, at the cost of human dignity.

RESOURCES

For other resources on ICA-Farmville and detention/deportation in Virginia, visit:

- **LiberArte Zine**
- **Brutality, Abuse & Neglect Graphic series**
- **White paper on abuse at ICA-Farmville**
- **FreeThemAllVA Coalition**
@FreeThemAllVA on social media
- **La ColectiVA**
@LaColectiVA703 on social media

Notes

- 1 Franzblau, J. (n.d.). Policy Brief: The Dark Money Trail Behind Private Detention: Immigration Centers of America-Farmville. Retrieved November, 2020, from <https://immigrantjustice.org/research-items/policy-brief-dark-money-trail-behind-private-detention-immigration-centers-america>.
- 2 Rkasnuam, D.; Garcia, C. (2016). DWN Banking on Detention 2016. Retrieved 2020, from https://www.detentionwatchnetwork.org/sites/default/files/reports/Banking%20on%20Detention%202016%20Update_DWN,%20CCR.pdf.
- 3 ICA-Farmville Abuse & Neglect. (2020, August 18). Retrieved November, 2020, from <https://lacolectiva.org/farmvilleabuse>.
- 4 Letter from Fidel Guevara Torres to Honorable Leonie Brinkema, filed in Santos Garcia et al. v. Wolf et al., Case No. 1:20-cv-00821, Eastern District of Virginia, Doc. 95 (Sept. 21, 2020).
- 5 Solitary confinement facts. (2019, June 21). Retrieved November, 2020, from <https://www.afsc.org/resource/solitary-confinement-facts>.
- 6 Olivares, J.; Washington, J. (2020, September 14). "A Silent Pandemic": Nurse at ICE Facility Blows the Whistle on Coronavirus Dangers. Retrieved November, 2020, from <https://theintercept.com/2020/09/14/ice-detention-center-nurse-whistleblower>.
- 7 ICA-Farmville Abuse & Neglect. (2020, August 18). Retrieved November, 2020, from <https://lacolectiva.org/farmvilleabuse>.
- 8 Bakker, M.; Supley, M. (2019, April 08). Fairfax County Should Do More to Protect Immigrant Communities. Retrieved November, 2020, from <https://bluevirginia.us/2019/04/fairfax-county-should-do-more-to-protect-immigrant-communities>.



Photo of ICA-Farmville in Farmville, Virginia

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