

“Imprisoned Immigrants’ Rights are also Important”



Reporter Yeon Hwa Jang

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On the road

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'Suicide of Jung Woon Ahn at a detention center'

Lisa Knox, the attorney in charge of the lawsuit



Lisa Knox, an attorney at California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ), protesting in front of the immigration detention center in San Francisco last year. [CCIJ website]

“One has the right to be protected, even at detention centers.”

Lisa Knox, an attorney at California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ), who has filed administrative litigation against the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and California Public Prosecutors' Office on behalf of Jung Woon Ahn (aged 74), who committed suicide at the federal immigration detention center in May because of his frustration with the obstinate measures taken by the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE), emphasized: “Since 2018, there have been more than 35 cases of suicide or death at detention centers similar to Ahn’s case. Of these, 9 are suicide cases. In order to prevent such deaths, immigrants need to speak up and assert their rights.”

According to the administrative petition submitted by CCIJ to DHS, permanent resident Ahn was sentenced to 10 years in prison for being convicted with attempted murder for using a gun in 2013. However, after serving his sentence and being released in February last year, he was handed over to the ICE and was imprisoned once again at the immigration detention center and underwent the deportation procedure.

With the support of CCIJ and others, Ahn requested to be released given his chronic diseases, old age, and permanent residency, but was rejected and eventually committed suicide at the detention center. <Published in the same newspaper on March 12, on page A-4>

3 legal service institutions: Centro Legal de la Raza - a legal service institution for immigrants and prisoners, California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ), and Disability Rights California (DRC) - a legal support group for the disabled, said that “It is a case where the immigrants’ rights have been neglected”, and have filed administrative litigation, requesting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to be investigated in February. Following this, the DHS responded on March 10 that they

would investigate the cause of Ahn's death. In addition, in accordance with the California State Act (AB32) revised in 2019, legal institutions claimed that the California government has the management rights to private prisons operated by the federal government ICE, and have thereby filed administrative litigation, demanding the California Public Prosecutors' Office to carry out an investigation, as well.

Attorney Knox said, "Fortunately, congressperson Rob Bonta, who was recently appointed as the Attorney General of California, is the co-proposer of this law. We anticipate the environment at detention centers to improve, as he understands the rights of immigrants and prisoners better than anyone else."

Attorney Knox said, "The immigrants need to step up in order to prevent the incidents similar to Ahn's from happening again. While we mentioned that DHS has announced that they will begin the investigation, it takes time to correct such a practice. We ask the Korean community to keep an eye out to ensure that the equal rights and protections, such as those given to the U.S. citizens, are also given to illegal immigrants and immigrants who are about to be deported."