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## News Release

### For Immediate Release

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### **Disability Rights California investigation finds immigration detention conditions pose extreme risks of harm for people with disabilities**

(Los Angeles, CA – March 5, 2019) An investigation by Disability Rights California (DRC) finds conditions at the Adelanto Detention Center, one of the largest privately operated immigration detention facilities in the United States, pose serious risks to people with mental illness and other disabilities.

The findings are contained in a report released today, “There Is No Safety Here: The Dangers for People with Mental Illness and Other Disabilities in Immigration Detention at GEO Group’s Adelanto ICE Processing Center.” The report follows an in-depth yearlong investigation. [Read the Report \(English and Spanish versions\)](#).

“When conditions in a detention facility fall below applicable constitutional and legal standards, it is people with disabilities who are among the most likely to suffer,” said Aaron Fischer, DRC litigation counsel. “Immigration detention facilities that operate like a jail are no exception.”

Among the nearly 2,000 people held at the Adelanto Detention Center on a given day, approximately 300 people have mental health treatment needs.

Many of them are seeking asylum in the United States. “We found case after case of asylum seekers who had experienced terrible violence and persecution before arriving in this country, and whose mental health

deteriorated once they found themselves at Adelanto,” said Pilar Gonzalez, DRC supervising attorney. “The conditions are incredibly harsh, and people go without the treatment they need until they reach a crisis moment – engaging in self-harm and even trying to end their lives.”

The report finds that Adelanto fails to provide adequate treatment to people with serious mental health needs. People who experience a psychiatric crisis are often met with pepper spray or extreme isolation in grim suicide watch cells. One man recounted, “If I say I am going to hurt myself, why pepper spray me? Why not try to help me?” Another man recalled the trauma of being held on suicide watch for several days. “I am afraid of being sent back to the suicide room, I do not tell the doctor how I feel, I say everything is fine because I don’t want to go back,” he said. “But I can’t sleep, there’s nightmares and I shake. I do not want to do anything but lay in bed.”

In the course of its investigation, DRC discovered that GEO Group, the private corrections contractor that owns and operates the Adelanto Detention Center, significantly underreports data on the number of suicide attempts that occur at the facility. “We found evidence that GEO Group has defined ‘suicide attempt’ in a way that is inconsistent with the federal government’s own definition. That means that GEO Group is not accurately reporting how many people are actually trying to take their own lives,” Fischer explained. “This undermines public oversight and accountability. You can’t redefine your way out of what is a dire situation for so many people at serious risk of harm.”

The report describes multiple cases in which ICE and GEO Group failed to timely address acute and chronic medical treatment needs. One woman who entered ICE custody needing cataracts surgery received no surgery or any other treatment during a full year in detention at Adelanto. By the time she was released, her vision had greatly deteriorated. Other detainees have been denied reasonable accommodations for their disabilities, from a walking cane for a blind man to sign language interpretation for a man who is deaf.

“Every single person in Adelanto is a civil detainee,” said Richard Diaz, DRC attorney. “They are not charged with or serving sentences for any criminal violation. The United States Constitution is clear that they should not be subjected to punitive conditions, and they definitely should have access to the medical and mental health care they need.”

Disability Rights California is a non-profit organization founded in 1978. We protect the rights of people with disabilities. Visit [disabilityrightsca.org](https://disabilityrightsca.org).