

## A Korean Man in His 70s Undergoing Deportation Procedures Kills Himself at a Detention Center



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### **Concerns of the coronavirus infection on top of existing chronic conditions**

#### **No proper protection of the federal law**

It was belatedly revealed that a Korean permanent resident in the U.S. aged over 70 had committed suicide at a federal immigration detention center because of his frustration with the obstinate measures taken by the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Immigrant support groups requested the ICE to release Ahn last May when the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing given his chronic diseases, old age, and permanent residency, but since this request was rejected, it has been pointed out that the ICE had violated the federal law.

In response, 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 they are in the process of carrying out administrative litigation, requesting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to be investigated.

According to the petition they filed, Jung Woon Ahn (aged 74) committed suicide at the Mesa Verde immigration detention center in Bakersfield on May 17. A detention center staff member found Ahn lying in his cell and immediately took emergency measures, but he could not be revived.

Ahn is a permanent resident according to the petition. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison for being convicted with attempted murder for using a gun in 2013. After serving his sentence and being released in February last year, he was immediately handed over to the ICE, imprisoned once again at the immigration detention center, and underwent the deportation procedure.

According to the petition, Ahn was diagnosed with depression with a risk of suicide, and had high blood pressure, diabetes, severe heart disease, etc. Ahn complained of suffering from shortness of breath and chest pain on several occasions after being relocated to the immigration detention center, but it has been found that he did not receive proper treatment. Above all, he expressed his fear of dying if he contracts COVID-19 given his poor health conditions to the detention center's medical staff numerous times, and even went on a hunger strike, demanding the detention center's environment to be changed before he committed suicide, but it has been revealed that the ICE ignored his request. According to the records, Ahn requested to be released 4 times through his attorney as the COVID-19 infection rate increased sharply.

Pamila Lew, a DRC attorney in charge of Ahn's administrative litigation, claimed: "Ahn was in a condition where he required continuous treatment and observations, but the ICE did not give him an opportunity to receive proper treatment. Such poor environment has led to Ahn's death."

Attorney Lew added, "Immigrants subject to deportation should be given the right to receive legal treatment under the federal law, but the ICE violated it. Ahn's family has filed a civil suit against DHS, in addition to the administrative litigation. Such incidents should not happen again."

Meanwhile, it has been reported that the DHS has set up a policy to begin the investigation of this case shortly. An official said, "Since the confirmation

procedure of the Minister of DHS has been concluded, the affiliated department (Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)) is expected to begin their investigation shortly.”