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ACLU Sues Aurora ICE Facility For 2017 Detainee Death Information

AURORA, CO – The American Civil Liberties Union sued Aurora's ICE immigrant detention facility and the private prison group that runs it, alleging that the two agencies have dragged their feet on Freedom of Information requests about a legal immigrant's 2017 death at the facility. The ACLU filed the lawsuit in Denver federal court alleging that ICE has deliberately stalled and withheld information about the death of Thornton resident Kamyar Samimi. Samimi was detained by ICE at his home on Nov. 17, 2017 and brought to the Aurora Geo Group Center. Within 15 days, he had died while in custody. According to the complaint, Samimi was a student from Iran when he entered the U.S. in 1976. He became a legal permanent resident in 1979. Samimi was arrested in connection with a 12-year-old cocaine possession conviction for which he had received a deferred sentence, the Denver Post reported. Samimi was placed on suicide watch after being found in his living area with "a bed sheet tied tightly around his neck," an October report from ICE said. According to the report Samimi self-reported that he suffered from "adult depression, heroine [sic] and methadone addiction and complaint of abdominal pain." When guards came to take him to a suicide watch area, Samimi tried to get into a wheelchair, but vomited blood, collapsed and stopped breathing, the report said. ICE initially said Samimi died of a heart attack, but the Adams County Coroner's report said he likely died of respiratory failure from choking on his own vomit, the complaint said. The ACLU said in its suit that the public has been concerned about the health of detainees at the Geo Group Center since Samimi and another detainee died in 2012. The complaint alleges that ICE has been delaying and stalling, with phone calls and promises to release documents followed by silence. The Denver office of ICE issued the following statement Tuesday: As a matter of policy, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement does not comment on pending litigation. However, lack of comment should not be construed as agreement with or stipulation to any of the allegations. As part of the Department of Homeland Security's homeland security mission, our trained law enforcement professionals adhere to the Department's mission and values, and uphold our laws while continuing to provide the nation with safety and security. On Tuesday, Colorado 6th District Congressman Jason Crow and 20 other U.S. House Democrats urged ICE in a public letter to be more transparent and address concerns of inadequate health care for detainees. "For too long, ICE has operated in the shadows in an administration that is more than willing to turn a blind eye to allegations of abuse and neglect. Draconian immigration practices have no place in America. Congress must provide oversight and ensure that the actions of our government reflect our national values," said Crow in a statement. "By requiring Congressional access to detention facilities, we will bring transparency to an opaque system and gain a more honest and accurate understanding of ICE's operations. Americans deserve to know how ICE is operating in our communities and to have the assurance that public health risks are handled safely and effectively." ICE officials turned Crow away when he asked for a tour of the facility on Feb. 20. The Tri-County Health Department said in March that the Geo Group ICE facility had an outbreak of Mumps with eight confirmed patients infected and six suspected cases, as well as six confirmed cases of chicken pox. More than 350 detainees were confined to quarantine in March 5 during a media tour of the facility at 3130 Oakland Street. Congressman Crow was given a tour of the facility on March 15, said Alethea Smock, Denver ICE spokesperson, via email.