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ACLU calls on Biden's Homeland Security secretary to close the ICE detention center in Estancia, NM

The American Civil Liberties Union is again asking the head of the Department of Homeland Security to close more immigration detention centers, including the Torrance County Detention Facility in Estancia, N.M. In a Sept. 6 letter to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, two senior ACLU staff pointed to Torrance as a stark example of appalling conditions at Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention centers that have gotten worse during his tenure. ACLU Federal Policy Director Christopher Anders and Senior Legislative Counsel Naureen Shah cite the recent death by suicide of Brazilian asylum seeker Kesley Vial at Torrance, and hazardous conditions documented by the DHS Office of the Inspector General, including lack of basic medical care, severe understaffing and cells that routinely flood with human excrement. DHS did not reply to a request for any comment on the letter or a question about whether Mayorkas has responded to it. After the ACLU urged Mayorkas to begin the reform process by closing 39 facilities notorious for substandard conditions and civil rights violations, the secretary closed two of them and announced in May 2021 that his agency would continuously review treatment and conditions inside. "We will not tolerate the mistreatment of individuals in civil immigration detention or substandard conditions of detention," Mayorkas said in a memo to ICE acting director Tae Johnson, who has personally been briefed on the conditions inside Torrance, according to ACLU New Mexico attorney Rebecca Sheff. Yet Torrance has remained open, and the atrocious conditions persist — while CoreCivic, its private operator, continues to profit from a contract with ICE, Anders and Shah wrote. Along with Torrance, they are also urging Mayorkas to close two other detention centers in neighboring Texas and another in Pennsylvania. "In light of their history of abuse, these facilities should not remain open in any form," they wrote, "and should not be kept on standby in case a subsequent administration seeks to use them for large-scale detention of families."