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California migrant detention center called out for 'years of abuse and misconduct'

SAN DIEGO (Border Report) — The American Civil Liberties Union has come out with a report that is critical of the Otay Mesa Detention Center, which houses hundreds of detainees, mostly immigrants awaiting trial, sent here by Immigration and Customs Enforcement. According to the report, the ACLU found systematic problems at the facility, and it's calling for an "end to oppressive, unnecessary, and inhumane systems of incarceration – especially facilities run by private, for-profit corporations." "It's a compilation of reports that have emerged over the years of abuse and misconduct at the Otay Mesa Detention Center," said Monika Langarica, an attorney with the ACLU. "It chronicles this repeated pattern of abuse at the facility including lack of medical care, safety, physical abuse, overuse of solitary confinement targeting advocates and people who speak out about conditions." Langarica said one of the biggest problems is the treatment of migrants who have not been convicted of anything but are forced to wait for long periods of time in custody. "People can be detained for months and for years without knowing when they will be released to their support system or to rejoin their families," she said. "So you're going to face all these abuses and on top of that you don't know for how long it will be." The ACLU's report is also very critical of the way the facility handled the COVID-19 virus within the facility. CoreCivic, the private company that runs the OMDC, said the report is driven by the ACLU's desire to end the private prison system, denying the findings and calling them "specious and sensationalized allegations contained in the ACLU brief." "These allegations are designed to exert political pressure rather than to serve as an objective description of the affirmative, proactive measures that OMDC has undertaken for over a year to address this unprecedented pandemic," CoreCivic said in a statement. When it came to allegations about the pandemic, CoreCivic said: "COVID-19 has created extraordinary challenges for every detention system in America – public and private. At the same time, the state of California on the whole has experienced some of the highest number of COVID-19 cases across the country. We have worked together closely with our government partners and state health officials to respond to this unprecedented situation appropriately, thoroughly and with care for the well-being of those entrusted to us and our communities. We believe this is why conditions at OMDC have stabilized, yet we remain vigilant. On allegations of abuse, CoreCivic said its ICE-contracted facilities are contractually required and held accountable to federal Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS), which include guidelines for the safe and appropriate accommodation of all detainees. CoreCivic added that anyone can report an allegation or suspected incident of sexual abuse or harassment, including detainees, staff or third parties. "We don't cut corners on care, staff or training, which meets, and in many cases exceeds, our government partners' standards," CoreCivic said.