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### **'Secret prison within a prison': Report details solitary confinement practices at Northwest detention center in Tacoma**

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The Northwest detention center in Tacoma holds people in solitary confinement on average more than any other dedicated U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility, according to a new watchdog report. The report by the University of Washington's Center for Human Rights also contends that the center — in violation of ICE's own policies — imposes solitary confinement on inmates with mental-health issues, or who are exercising their First Amendment rights by going on hunger strikes. The report is based on federal government records and documents by the company that operates the prison, GEO Group, which were obtained by the Center for Human Rights after years of litigation. The privately run detention center holds as many as 1,575 immigrants accused by the government of living illegally in the U.S. and facing deportation proceedings. In an interview, Angelina Godoy, director for UW's Center for Human Rights, said the report "speaks to this existence of a secret prison within a prison." "There's essentially no effective oversight of the practice" of solitary confinement, Godoy added. "And from the data that we were able to gather, there's really disturbing conclusions about just flagrant violation of international human rights norms." Asked about the report, a spokesperson for ICE's Northwest Region wrote in an email that the agency "does not retaliate in any way and respects the rights of all people to voice their opinion without interference." "Any suggestion to the contrary is irresponsible, speculative and inaccurate," wrote spokesperson Tanya Roman, who referred questions about the GEO Group's processes to the company. An email Friday to the GEO Group seeking comment was not returned. The report is based on various sets of overlapping records from between 2013 and March 2020 that track solitary confinement cases and significant incidents by either ICE or GEO Group employees. Researchers combined that information with statements by people who are or were detained by collaborating with various advocacy organizations, according to the report, as well as reviewing federal court filings. Stays in solitary confinement at the center averaged nearly 70 days, which was "29% longer than any other dedicated detention facility," according to the report. "The national average during this period was approximately 30 days." Using ICE data between September 2013 and March 2020, the review found that 34% of solitary placements "involved people whose records were flagged to indicate the person had been diagnosed with a mental illness." "Six placements listed 'mental illness' as the reason for their placement in solitary," according to the report. "The longest placement of an individual in solitary confinement for reasons of mental illness was 147 days; on average, people detained at (the center) who were placed in solitary for mental health reasons spent approximately 38 days in segregation." "This clearly runs afoul of international standards, which mandate caution for the placement of mentally ill prisoners in solitary at all, and expressly prohibit solitary stays longer than 15 days for any prisoner, considering it tantamount to torture," according to the report. In at least six cases, the center put inmates into solitary confinement after they protested their treatment through hunger strikes, according to the report. "This way of responding to protest suggests the retaliatory use of solitary confinement, a practice inconsistent with international human rights norms," the report concluded. The report also detailed discrepancies between the data in the records being kept. In one instance, the ACLU in 2018 filed a lawsuit against the center after an inmate involved in hunger strikes, Jesus Chavez, was put in disciplinary segregation, according to the report. But, "A detailed review of all four separate logs of solitary confinement placements from 2013 to 2020, plus hundreds of pages of written documentation prepared and archived by GEO Group governing the reasons for all solitary placements from January 1, 2018 to March 31, 2020, there is no mention of Mr. Chavez ever having been placed in solitary," according to the report. "Had his case not been the subject of litigation in federal court, there would be no recognition that he had ever been in solitary." Researchers "asked ICE's attorneys why Mr. Chavez's case was not included in the collection of records provided to us, since they insist these cover all solitary placements during this period," according to the report. But, "They indicated that they would not answer any further questions until several sets of unrelated documents we are seeking have been released to us, a process that is projected to last into 2021."