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WA attorney general sues to close Tacoma immigrant detention center

Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson is suing to force the immediate closure of the Northwest ICE Processing Center (NWIPC) in Tacoma. The facility detains immigrants and holds people for processing, and is operated by the for-profit company GEO Group. However, a state law passed in April of this year banned private prisons. Attorney General Ferguson says GEO Group was supposed to shutter the detention center this past Monday, Sept. 27, when the company's contract expired. GEO Group had negotiated a new contract until 2025 with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but Ferguson says the new law doesn't allow for that extension. "So we're asking the court to take action to shut them down," says Ferguson. "They are out of compliance with state law and they admit it, so from our standpoint it's not especially complicated. State law broadly makes for-profit prisons or detention centers illegal in Washington state." A GEO Group executive said in a statement they believe the new state law is unconstitutional, and that it attempts to make the operations of a federal institution unlawful. GEO is a private company, but contracts with ICE at the federal level. They say the state's new lawsuit is without merit. The company previously filed its own legal complaint, alleging it should be able to remain open. GEO's statement says it has a similar challenge ongoing in California. GEO Group has also been in court with Attorney General Bob Ferguson over how much money detainees make for the work they perform at the NWIPC. That case ended in a mistrial after jurors couldn't reach a unanimous verdict. Ferguson says they may attempt to re-try the case. Immigrant rights groups, such as La Resistencia, are applauding Ferguson's lawsuit and have been working to shut down this and other detention and deportation facilities.