

# 4 immigrants die in 4 days in ICE private prisons

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🕒 21 December 2025

Four immigrants died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody during a four-day period last week, all of them in detention facilities run by private prison companies. Three died in prisons run by GEO Group and one in a prison run by CoreCivic.

The four were from four different countries: **Jean Wilson Brutus**, 41, from Haiti, on December 12; **Delvin Francisco Rodriguez**, 39, from Nicaragua, on December 14; **Fouad Saeed Abdulkadir**, 46, from Eritrea, on December 14; and **Nenko Stanev Gantchev**, 56, from Bulgaria, on December 15.

All four died suddenly of medical conditions ranging from chest pain to diabetes, according to reports released by ICE. Brutus died the day after he arrived at the GEO Group facility in Newark, New Jersey, while Abdulkadir died at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, also run by GEO Group, in Phillipsburg, Pennsylvania, after 215 days in ICE custody. His death came only three days after he filed a federal lawsuit seeking an emergency habeas corpus petition, citing, among other reasons, inadequate access to medical care.

Gantchev had lived in the United States for more than a quarter-century, was married to an American citizen, and was seeking permanent residence status on that basis. He died at the GEO Group North Lake Processing Center in Baldwin, Michigan, in the northern part of the lower peninsula.

Rodriguez was pronounced dead at a hospital in Natchez, Mississippi after staff at the Adams County Detention Center, operated for ICE by CoreCivic, found him unresponsive and “lacking a pulse.”

“Four detainee deaths in one week is a red-hot crisis,” Eunice Cho, senior counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union National Prison Project, told the *Washington Post*. “There is no question in my mind that this represents a clear deterioration of medical care and the worsening conditions in ICE detention.”

ICE recently claimed that “in-custody deaths this past year average less than 1%,” boasting that this figure was “the lowest in ICE history.” Given that the total number of migrants currently held in ICE

detention facilities has now topped 66,000, the highest ever, the “less than 1%” boast means that ICE would be pleased if fewer than 660 migrants died this year.

Both the statistic and the boast are indications of the deliberate indifference to the physical survival of immigrant detainees that permeates the repressive apparatus of the US government, and is being whipped up further by the demonization of immigrants by Trump and top aides like White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem.

At least 32 migrants have died in ICE custody so far this year, while several others have died while fleeing ICE agents or in facilities not run under contract to the agency. In December alone, seven migrants have died in ICE custody, making it the worst month for such deaths in recent history.

The three other December deaths are: **Francisco Gaspar Andres**, 48, from Guatemala, on December 3, who was held at the Camp East Montana Detention Facility, run by Acquisition Logistics on the grounds of Ft. Bliss, Texas, near El Paso; **Pete Sumalo Montejo**, 72, from the Philippines, on December 5, who had been detained at the Montgomery Processing Center, a GEO Group facility in Conroe, Texas, near Houston; and **Shiraz Fathehali Sachwani**, 48, from Pakistan, on December 6, after detention at Prairieland Detention Center, a private prison in Dallas, Texas run by LaSalle Corrections.

Many of the facilities at which these deaths took place have been cited frequently by immigrant rights groups because of poor housing, food and access to medical care, or exceptional brutality by staff and ICE agents. The chief investigator at the GEO Conroe facility, for example, Charles Siringi, pled guilty last month to attacking a detainee, slamming him into a wall, dragging him across the floor and then choking him, before finally slamming his head into a window.

Immigrants rights groups have repeatedly called for the closure of the GEO Group facility in Phillipsburg, Pennsylvania, where three migrants have died in the past 18 months, one a suicide, the other two of supposedly “natural causes.”

The sadistic ill-treatment of migrants did not begin when Trump re-entered the White House in January. The American Civil Liberties Union called for the Biden administration to close the CoreCivic facility in Natchez, where Delvin Francisco Rodriguez died, as long ago as 2021, and sponsored a similar appeal for the shutdown of the GEO Phillipsburg facility in 2024.

The case of Nenko Stanev Gantchev, the 56-year-old Bulgarian immigrant who lived in Chicago for three decades, is particularly well documented in recent media reports because of his long residence in the city and his American citizen wife, who requested anonymity out of fear of retaliation from federal officials.

“I want people to know what happened to him, a man who lived 30 years here, hard working, paid taxes, and they treated him like an animal. They are so rude to him,” she told the press. “They

treated him like he was a murderer.” She emphasized that despite living in the US for three decades, paying taxes and not being a criminal, her husband was treated with extreme harshness.

Gantchev first arrived in Chicago on a student visa. According to ICE records, he was granted lawful permanent resident (LPR) status on May 17, 2005. Since 2008 he owned and operated a trucking company called “J&D Boys.” Friends described him as “one of the hardest workers” they knew. However, in 2009, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) denied his LPR status. He married a US citizen in 2017, and at the time of his arrest, was in the process of applying for a green card through their marriage.

An immigration judge ordered his removal to Bulgaria on January 11, 2023, but he was called for an interview on his green card application on September 23. According to his wife, agents appeared to be waiting for him to arrive at the interview, and he was arrested. This was during Operation Midway Blitz, during which ICE and Border Patrol seized thousands of Chicagoans in sudden, heavily armed street and workplace operations.

Gantchev was among hundreds of people who were initially ordered released after the blatantly illegal warrantless snatch-and-grab arrests, fabricated information, and mass detentions of US citizens and lawful residents were deemed potential violations of the Castañón Nava consent decree. However, the Seventh Circuit Appeals Court blocked this release order.

Gantchev was told he could either submit to voluntary removal to Bulgaria or remain in custody at North Lake hoping to eventually be granted bond. According to his wife, he chose to stay: “I told him, ‘You have to make the decision, but please don’t leave me alone here.’” His bond appeal was pending at the time of his death.

Gantchev suffered from type 2 diabetes, and his family and friends reported serious concerns about the medical care he received while detained. His wife told the ABC7 I-Team that no dietary accommodations were made for his diabetic condition. She and family friend Anna stated that “there was no special diet” and “the food they were given was not adequate to maintain blood sugar levels.” The small amount of food provided was insufficient for maintaining Gantchev’s blood sugar levels, leading his family to send money through the facility’s system so he could purchase additional items from the commissary.

Gantchev’s wife knew something was wrong on Monday evening, December 16—the couple’s eighth wedding anniversary—when she didn’t receive his expected nightly phone call. When she searched for his name on the ICE locator website, it indicated he had been released. She later learned from the Bulgarian Embassy on the morning of December 17 that her husband had died.

According to ICE’s official account, Gantchev was discovered unresponsive on the floor of his cell during routine checks on the evening of December 15, 2025. ICE stated that the death is “suspected to be from natural causes,” though the official cause of death remains under investigation. However, family members told reporters they have received minimal information about what happened. Anna

told the I-Team: “To be honest, the family hasn’t really learned much of anything. They believed he collapsed and that it may have been a heart attack, and that was it. They gave [his wife] no other information. Nobody else called her.”

The brutal North Lake facility is also holding the latest of at least four young people from Detroit’s Western International High School (WIHS) who have been abducted by ICE this year. Mor Ba, 19, was born in Senegal and had recently graduated from WIHS. The night he was detained he had been filling out college applications.

GEO Group’s documented history of neglect and abuse prompted the ACLU of Michigan to warn in June that the facility’s reopening posed “a major threat to our immigrant friends and neighbors throughout Michigan and the Midwest.” Those warnings have materialized rapidly.

The Democrats have supported the massive buildup of ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the technical infrastructure they employ over decades, facilitating the expansion of the deportation apparatus and helping to normalize it. Opposing the mobilization of the working class against the war on immigrants, they seek to manage and contain opposition.

To that end, Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib visited North Lake on December 5. She described alarming conditions: “Food is brought straight to their cells, and they report ice cold temperatures with people trying to sleep in jackets and under piles of thin blankets.” Tlaib also reported multiple suicide attempts, including one just two weeks before her visit. The population exceeded 1,400 detainees.

But such admissions prompt only crocodile tears and “deep concern.” The Biden administration’s 2021 executive order to end private prison contracts proved purely cosmetic, leaving ICE detention facilities untouched and allowing GEO Group to simply wait for the political winds to shift. The result: a facility that had closed in 2022 was fully operational within months of Trump’s return to office.

Further, Michigan state authorities under Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer actively collaborated with GEO Group to recruit and hire staff for the North Lake facility via “Michigan Works!” The local chapter helped GEO Group organize job fairs and recruitment efforts beginning in 2019 when the facility reopened under its previous federal prison contract, and again in 2025 for the ICE contract. Shelly Keene, executive director at “Michigan Works! West Central,” recalled that in 2019 her office received an early morning call about the contract: “We stopped, dropped, and rolled and did everything possible for GEO.”

In August 2025, over 30 immigrant advocacy groups signed an open letter urging Governor Whitmer to reject federal funding for new ICE detention operations and to ensure that “Michigan Works!” would no longer collaborate with GEO Group. The letter stated: “It’s already unacceptable that Michigan Works! is funneling taxpayer money and resources toward the GEO Group so they can cash in on tearing families apart and locking up our immigrant neighbors in Baldwin.”

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