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U.S. NEWS

Federal prisons being used to detain people arrested in Trump's immigration crackdown



BY **MICHAEL R. SISAK**

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NEW YORK (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration is using federal prisons to detain some people arrested in its immigration crackdown, the federal Bureau of Prisons said Friday, returning to a strategy that [drew allegations of mistreatment](#) during his first term.

In a statement to The Associated Press, the prison agency said it is assisting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement “by housing detainees and will continue to support our law enforcement partners to fulfill the administration’s policy objectives.”

The Bureau of Prisons declined to say how many immigration detainees it is taking in, or which prison facilities are being used.

“For privacy, safety, and security reasons, we do not comment on the legal status of an individual, nor do we specify the legal status of individuals assigned to any particular facility, including numbers and locations,” the agency said.

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Three people familiar with the matter told the AP that federal jails in Los Angeles, Miami and Philadelphia and federal prisons in Atlanta, Leavenworth, Kansas, and Berlin, New Hampshire, are among the facilities being used. The people were not authorized to speak publicly and did so on condition of anonymity. The Miami jail alone is set to receive up to 500 detainees, the people said.

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An influx of immigration detainees could put yet more strain on the Bureau of Prisons, which [AP reporting revealed](#) has been plagued by severe understaffing, violence and other problems. The agency is seeking to temporarily move employees from its other facilities to help with immigrant detention.

The Bureau of Prisons is the Justice Department's biggest agency with more than 30,000 employees, 122 facilities, 155,000 inmates and an annual budget of about \$8 billion. In December, the agency said it was [closing one prison and idling six prison camps](#) to address "significant challenges, including a critical staffing

shortage, crumbling infrastructure and limited budgetary resources.”

A message seeking comment was left for ICE.

Trump has vowed to deport millions of the estimated 11.7 million people in the U.S. illegally. ICE currently has the budget to detain only about 41,000 people and the administration has not said how many detention beds it needs to achieve its goals.

Many detainees are taken to ICE processing centers, privately operated detention facilities or local prisons and jails it contracts with.

On Thursday, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said a second flight of detainees landed at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base in Cuba. Immigrant rights groups [sent a letter Friday](#) demanding access to people who have been sent to Guantanamo Bay, saying the base should not be used as a “legal black hole.”

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday that more than 8,000 people have been arrested in immigration enforcement actions since Trump’s Jan. 20 inauguration. Of them, 461 were released for reasons that included medical conditions and lack of detention capacity, she said.

ICE averaged 787 arrests a day from Jan. 23 to Jan. 31, compared to a daily average of 311 during a 12-month period that ended Sept. 30 during former President Joe Biden’s administration. ICE has stopped publishing daily arrests totals.

In 2018, during Trump’s first term, the Bureau of Prisons reached an agreement with ICE and Customs and Border Protection to detain up to 1,600 immigrants at federal prison facilities in Arizona, California, Oregon, Washington and Texas.

Six immigrants detained under that arrangement at a medium-security federal prison in Victorville, California, sued Trump, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions, and immigration and prison officials, [alleging “punitive and inhumane” treatment](#).

The men, who were seeking asylum in the U.S., accused the Bureau of Prisons of providing inedible meals and spoiled milk, infringing on their ability to practice their religious faith, allowing only a few hours a week of recreation in the hot sun, and failing to provide adequate medical care.

Last October, the American Civil Liberties Union sued the Bureau of Prisons and immigration authorities under the Freedom of Information Act for [records related to the use of federal prisons to detain immigrants](#) during Trump's first term. A conference in that case is scheduled for Feb. 28.

An [ongoing AP investigation](#) has exposed serious issues in the Bureau of Prisons, including rampant misconduct, sexual abuse by staff, dozens of escapes, chronic violence, and employees ill-equipped to respond to emergencies because of staffing limitations.

Last week, El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele offered to put U.S. immigration detainees and other U.S. prisoners in his country's [massive CECOT prison](#) — even American citizens and legal residents. In a post on the social platform X, Bukele said he was offering the U.S. “the opportunity to outsource part of its prison system” in exchange for a “relatively low” fee.

Trump says he was open to the idea, but acknowledged it could be legally problematic.

“I'm just saying if we had a legal right to do it, I would do it in a heartbeat,” Trump [told reporters Tuesday in the Oval Office](#). “I don't know if we do or not, we're looking at that right now.”

Associated Press reporter Rebecca Santana in Washington contributed to this report.



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Sisak is an Associated Press reporter covering law enforcement and courts in New York City, including former President Donald Trump's criminal and civil cases and problems plaguing the federal prison system.

