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Groups say Hudson County immigration detention site not giving adequate medical care

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Dozens of people being held in Hudson County on immigration matters have not received adequate medical care, two advocacy groups that monitor immigration detention sites said in a letter sent this week to various government agencies.

Written on behalf of 61 detainees, the letter included a request for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to investigate conditions at the Hudson County Correctional Facility in Kearny and to “provide ongoing oversight” of the jail. It also said that of the 53 detention centers monitored by the advocacy groups, Hudson was “one of the top three detention facilities with the most human and civil rights complaints.”

The Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement, known as CIVIC, and First Friends of New Jersey & New York sent the letter on Tuesday to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, known as ICE, the Department of Homeland Security, the Hudson County Board of Freeholders and the correctional facility.

The groups alleged, among other things, that some of the people it represents faced long delays to get proper care, that the jail sometimes charged co-pays even though that practice is not allowed, and that a lack of sanitary conditions has led some detainees to suffer from bacterial infections.

Gillian Christensen, a spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security, said her department’s civil rights and civil liberties office “will evaluate the allegations being made and what further steps may need to be taken.” She added that “ICE remains committed to ensuring that all individuals in our custody have access to high quality medical and mental health care” and that “significant reforms” have been made over the years to the immigration detention system and ICE’s health care management.

Luis Martinez, a spokesman for ICE, which has oversight of the detainees, said on Wednesday night that his agency received the complaint. “ICE is looking into the matter,” he said. Hudson County jail officials could not be reached for comment.

The advocacy groups alleged that ICE responded in 2014 to a complaint about one detainee, Nelson De Jesus, by saying he would receive appropriate medication and treatment but instead quickly deported him. Prior to his deportation, the letter said, one of his daughters tried to visit him at a local hospital where a receptionist told her that it was “against the law” for her to be there.

Another man, 55-year-old Vera Stojka, died in 2009 after being transported from the Hudson County jail to a regional care facility in South Carolina, according to the letter. His death originally was determined to be caused by a cardiac arrest but the cause was later ruled to be liver cancer, the letter said. The groups said the incident “raised significant questions” about

why his liver cancer had not been diagnosed sooner.

The letter detailed other complaints of alleged delayed medical treatment without using full names. The groups asked ICE to appoint an independent investigator to examine the jail's medical care policies and asked for more input by advocacy groups, with regular meetings to be held with ICE, Hudson County freeholders, and jail officials.

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