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Immigrant-rights advocates seek closure of facility

ADELANTO — Local residents, activists and clergy members from throughout Southern California gathered in front of an Adelanto detention facility Tuesday asking for an end to immigrant incarceration and closure of the facility.

Representatives from Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement and Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Coalition led about two dozen people protesting the detention of family members and friends, and alleged poor conditions at Adelanto Detention Facility West, a GEO Group-run U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement unit on Rancho Road.

ICE spokespersons in Laguna Niguel said in a statement the facility meets the agency's 2011 Performance Based National Detention Standards, and "all facilities authorized to hold long-term immigration detainees are subject to rigorous, regular inspections to ensure the welfare of those housed there."

The Adelanto facility, which consists of west and east sections, underwent two comprehensive inspections last year and was found to be in compliance, ICE officials said.

Christina Fialho, co-executive director of CIVIC, said two men have died from medical neglect while in confinement. An ICE report found that the facility's medical staff made serious errors in caring for a detainee who died of liver disease and other ailments in 2012. Another detainee died due to a medical condition earlier this year, but ICE officials say that incident is still under investigation.

Fialho claims that detainee health care takes a back seat to the profit that each one generates for the facility management company.

"Not one more" bed, cell or incarceration, she chanted with the group.

Fialho said the institution plans to add 640 beds to the 1,300-bed facility when alternatives — including faith-based and nonprofit community housing — could keep detainees for "17 cents a day."

Patricia Suarez, of Alhambra, said she was at the gathering because her son Victor's incarceration is a hardship on the household.

"We're fighting for justice and for there to be compassion for those inside," Suarez said through an interpreter.

Officials with ICE say the department "is committed to ensuring the welfare and safety of all those in its custody, including providing detainees with timely and appropriate medical care."

Todd Becraft, a Los Angeles-based attorney with three clients at the facility, chanced upon the assembly.

"It's layer upon layer of Band-aids," Becraft told a reporter about the detentions and hearings that take place at the facility.

A call to GEO Group spokesmen in Florida on Tuesday afternoon was not immediately returned.

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Paul Murray of Santa Barbara and other demonstrators protest at the Geo Group's Adelanto Detention Facility on Tuesday. Members of several different groups from Southern California took part in the protest against detainment of immigrants who are in the country illegally. (James Quigg, Daily Press)

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