

Alabama

Weekend immigration detainee protest at Etowah County Jail draws activists



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About 50 activists descended on the Etowah County Detention Center Sunday afternoon to protest federal immigration policy and the housing of immigration detainees there.

William Anderson, a spokesman for Adelante Alabama, said the protest featured a speaker and a limited march around the facility. Adelante Alabama has staged several protests at the jail over the past two years as part of its "Shut Down Etowah" campaign. The group claims that conditions at the jail, and at other detainee centers around the country, highlight the need for reform of U.S. immigration policy.

Etowah County Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Natalie Barton said there were no arrests. "It was about like the previous protests we've had," she said.

As at a February protest, the demonstration dealt with [the death of Teka Gulema](#), an Ethiopian national who had been detained at the center last year but was released from custody in November 2015 by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency.

Gulema had been incarcerated for assault and other charges in Virginia, but was paralyzed following a bacterial infection. Gulema died in January in a Gadsden hospital.

Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC), an activist group based in San Francisco, filed a complaint on Gulema's behalf with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) last month. According to the eight page complaint, the group says Gulema's death illustrates problems faced by detainees at the jail, which it says includes poor medical care.

During the protest, several demonstrators were joined in chants by detainees inside the jail.

"I've been to several protests like this, and I've never seen anything like that before," Anderson said.

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