

California freezes growth of immigration detention facility in Adelanto

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Senate Bill 29, signed by Brown on Thursday, prevents local governments from entering into a contract, or renewing or modifying contracts, with for-profit companies and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement for the purpose of expanding the number of beds, according to the bill's language, authored by state Sen. Ricardo Lara, D-Bell Gardens.

"California should not be siding with companies that profit from the detention of asylum seekers and the misery of divided families," Lara said in a statement. "Senate Bill 29 will stop the runaway train of detention and shine a light on private companies so California can ensure the human rights and dignity of those immigrants detained in the state."

Adelanto's GEO Group-operated detention center, which maintains nearly 2,000 beds, is the largest of facilities in three California cities currently contracting with private companies for immigration detention.

The Imperial Regional Detention Center in Holtville has 704 beds and the Mesa Verde Detention Facility in McFarland has 400, according to Lara.

The passage of the "Dignity Not Detention Act" comes after state lawmakers **enacted a decade-long moratorium** on such detention growth in July. The senate bill was also signed the same day Brown approved making California a "sanctuary state."

In recent years, GEO Group's Adelanto Detention Center, where three detainees have died in 2017, has come **under intense scrutiny** from state legislators and advocacy groups who have railed **against the facility for rampant human rights abuses** they say **go unchecked**.

Pablo Paez, spokesman for GEO, defended the company's track record in a statement to the Daily Press, citing "**a long history of consistently meeting or exceeding** the federal government's national performance-based detention standards," and warned of the bill's unintentional consequences for detainees.

Without "special purpose facilities," such as the Adelanto Detention Facility, Paez said, immigration detainees would likely be housed in local jails "in more punitive environments" that don't meet the aforementioned standards.

"Further, should the need for special-purpose immigration detention facilities exceed the available capacity in California in the future," he continued, "under this law, it is likely immigration authorities would resort to transferring individuals to out-of-state facilities, separating them from their families and making it harder for them to access legal and support services."

ICE Acting Director Tom Homan on Friday addressed the "Sanctuary State" legislation, which provides new protections to undocumented immigrants, and seemed to refer to the limits placed on detention by agreeing it would force detainees outside of the state.

But immigrant advocates lauded lawmakers for their support.

"This is a historic day!" Christina Fialho, co-founder and executive director of Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement, wrote in an email to supporters.

"An economy based upon the confinement of people for profit is immoral, and now in the state of California, its expansion is illegal," Fialho said in a statement, calling the bill "one of the most important pieces of pro-immigrant legislation in recent history."

"There is much more work to be done," she added, "but this bill is a step forward in the fight to end our costly, inhumane, and unaccountable detention system."

Grisel Ruiz, staff attorney at the Immigrant Legal Resource Center, said the framework of for-profit facilities inherently "put(s) people in danger."

"With the Dignity Not Detention Act, we will check the growth of private immigration detention where prison corporations quite literally profit from human suffering," Ruiz said, "as we continue our work to end the unnecessary practice of jailing immigrants altogether."

The Adelanto Detention Facility last expanded in June 2015, **adding 640 beds including 259 for women — a first for the center.**

Adelanto received from GEO a \$963,600 mitigation fee this fiscal year, city officials said. In addition, the city charges a \$50,000 administrative fee, pushing the city's revenue from the private company over the \$1 million mark.

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