

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2026

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20528

Todd M. Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Secretary Noem and Acting Director Lyons:

We are alarmed by the horrifying news that Emmanuel Damas, a Haitian asylum-seeker and member of our community, died in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on March 2, 2026. ICE's failure to provide timely medical care to Mr. Damas appears to have contributed to his worsening medical condition and tragic death. Mr. Damas is, at least, the tenth person to die in ICE's custody this year. We write to demand answers on ICE's treatment of Mr. Damas and to ask ICE to conduct a full investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death. We also urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to adhere to its own standards and provide proper medical treatment care to detainees in its care.

Mr. Damas was a 56-year-old asylum seeker from Haiti living in Dorchester, Massachusetts. In September 2025, Mr. Damas was taken into custody by federal immigration agents and transferred to multiple ICE detention centers across the country, including to facilities in Boston, New York, and Texas.¹ Four months ago, Mr. Damas was transferred to the Central Arizona Florence Correctional Center ("Florence detention center") in Florence, Arizona.²

In February 2026, Mr. Damas first informed staff at the Florence detention center that he was suffering from a bad toothache. Over the course of two days, on February 17 and 18, Mr. Damas visited the health clinic at the facility. The facility supplied him with over-the-counter medications, acetaminophen and ibuprofen, but reportedly denied him dental treatment. Several days later, on February 19, Mr. Damas informed his family that his condition had significantly worsened, that he could no longer speak properly, and that he would be taken to a hospital. The family received a call from another detainee at the Florence detention center that day, who

¹ Emily Bregel, *Florence ICE detainee dead after untreated tooth infection, official says*, Tucson.com (Mar. 4, 2026), https://tucson.com/news/local/border/article_a5053df1-4ade-4424-972f-e9f5270829bb.html.

² *Id.*

confirmed that Mr. Damas had been very sick for the last five days and that the facility had lacked urgency in sending him to the hospital.

On February 20, the Damas family learned from staff at the HonorHealth John C. Lincoln Medical Center that Mr. Damas was suffering from pneumonia, had been placed on life support in the Intensive Care Unit, and remained in critical condition. Medical staff explained that the ensuing 24-to-48-hour period would be crucial for Mr. Damas's survival.

During this critical time, Mr. Damas's family was left unaware of his medical condition and physical whereabouts. For the next few days, the hospital declined to release Mr. Damas's medical information and redirected his brother, Presly Nelson, to ICE. Mr. Nelson repeatedly contacted the Florence detention facility to obtain more information, to no avail. On February 22, two days after learning of Mr. Damas's acute state, the Damas family remained unaware whether Mr. Damas was still alive. The next day, Mr. Nelson contacted the ICE facility again and was informed that his brother had been moved back into detention but was given no information on his condition.

On February 23, Senator Markey reached out to ICE, requesting an update on Mr. Damas's health status and physical location. ICE did not provide satisfactory answers, blaming the lack of a Privacy Release Form. Senator Markey had made clear that a Privacy Release Form was impossible given that it was unclear where Mr. Damas was located and if he was even alive. Several days later, the Damas family learned that Mr. Damas was hospitalized again and was scheduled for surgery on February 26. On March 2, Mr. Damas died.

Mr. Damas's family has alleged that ICE failed to provide Mr. Damas with timely medical care, allowing an untreated toothache to become a deadly infection. Moreover, Mr. Nelson's entreaties for information about his brother's well-being were met with silence and stonewalling. ICE shared few to no reports about Mr. Damas's deteriorating health status with his family, keeping them in the dark until it was far too late. This case raises serious questions regarding ICE's ability to timely treat and care for individuals it detains.

Mr. Damas's death comes against a deeply troubling backdrop of mounting reports of deadly conditions inside immigration detention centers. Last year marked the deadliest year in ICE history in over two decades, with 32 reported fatalities.³ This dramatic increase is poised to continue, as deaths in ICE custody in 2026 are already outpacing last year's tragic numbers. It is unacceptable that, under your watch, DHS has failed to keep immigrants in its custody safe from preventable death.

For months, advocates, lawyers, and members of Congress have been blowing the whistle on the overcrowding and inhumane conditions found in DHS detention centers across the country.⁴

³ Maanvi Singh et al., *2025 was ICE's deadliest year in two decades. Here are the 32 people who died in custody*, *The Guardian* (Jan. 4, 2026), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2026/jan/04/ice-2025-deaths-timeline>.

⁴ Miriam Jordan & Jazmine Ulloa, *Concerns Grow Over Dire Conditions in Immigrant Detention*, *N.Y. Times* (June 28, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/28/us/immigrant-detention-conditions.html>; Christine Fernando, *Judge orders improvements at Broadview ICE facility after claims of inhumane conditions*, *Associated Press* (Nov, 5, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/judge-orders-improvements-at-broadview-ice-facility-after-claims->

Despite a dramatic increase in the number of detainees held by ICE, the Administration has failed to properly care for these individuals. Reports of improper and untimely medical treatment abound. Last year, a group of detainees sued the Trump administration, alleging that a detention center in California repeatedly denied them proper medications, failed to provide timely specialist appointments, and ignored emergency treatment requests.⁵ Another suit on behalf of detainees alleges a pattern of abuses by a for-profit ICE detention center, including the denial of critical medical care and the lack of sanitary living conditions.⁶ To make matters worse, since October 2025, the Trump administration has stopped paying third-party providers for medical treatment for ICE detainees.⁷ According to one Administration official, the stopped payments have caused medical providers to deny medical service to detainees.⁸

DHS is also repeatedly violating its own guidance governing the medical care of detainees. ICE's national detention standards mandate that "[a]ll detainees shall have access to appropriate medical, dental, and mental health care, including emergency services."⁹ The standards also specify that "[e]mergency dental treatment shall be provided for immediate relief of pain, trauma, and acute oral infection."¹⁰ As Mr. Damas's death tragically highlights, individuals in ICE's custody are not treated in accordance with the standards governing ICE's conduct.

The Florence detention center is owned and operated by CoreCivic, one of the largest for-profit detention contractors. CoreCivic has long been roiled by reports of horrific conditions and insufficient medical care in its detention centers.¹¹ For years, detainees and their lawyers have complained that the company provides inadequate medical attention, forcing detainees to wait for hours on end to see nurses, only to be turned away, denying visits to outside specialists such as cancer doctors or dentists, and failing to supply patients with lifesaving medicines.¹² Just last month, cases of measles were confirmed at two detention centers operated by CoreCivic.¹³

A neighboring detention center also managed by CoreCivic, the Eloy Detention Center, has been the subject of dozens of complaints to the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and the

[of-inhumane-conditions](#); see also Press Release, Markey Again Demands Answers About Abysmal Conditions of ICE Field Office in Burlington, MA (Jan. 31, 2026), <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/markey-again-demands-answers-about-abysmal-conditions-of-ice-field-office-in-burlington-ma>.

⁵ Hibah Ansari, *Inside an ICE Detention Center: Detained People Describe Severe Medical Neglect, Harrowing Conditions*, ACLU (Dec. 17, 2025), <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/inside-an-ice-detention-center-detained-people-describe-severe-medical-neglect-harrowing-conditions>.

⁶ Public Counsel, *Adelanto Detainees File Federal Lawsuit Challenging Inhumane Conditions at Adelanto ICE Processing Center* (Jan. 26, 2026), <https://publiccounsel.org/press-releases/adelanto-detainees-file-federal-lawsuit-challenging-inhumane-conditions-at-adelanto-ice-processing-center/>.

⁷ Judd Legum, *ICE has stopped paying for detainee medical treatment*, Popular Information (Jan. 20, 2026), <https://popular.info/p/ice-has-stopped-paying-for-detainee>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *National Detention Standards* (Revised 2025), <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/detention-standards/2025/nds2025.pdf>.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Katie Thomas et al., *Sick Detainees Describe Poor Care at Facilities Run by ICE Contractor*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 14, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/14/business/ice-health-care-corecivic-immigrants-detention.html>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

Office of the Immigration Detention Ombudsman.¹⁴ Last year, a 45-year-old man who had been detained at the Eloy Detention Center died due to multiple infections.¹⁵ Advocates have also reported that detainees at the facility face extensive barriers to accessing proper medical treatment.¹⁶

Mr. Damas's death is a tragedy and likely, a highly preventable one. His passing has shaken a family and community that have shown remarkable strength in the face of unimaginable loss. Mr. Damas's family members deserve to know the full truth of what happened to him. In order to help us and the public better understand the circumstances of Mr. Damas's death, we write to request answers in writing to the following questions no later than March 20, 2026.

1. Did Mr. Damas submit any verbal or written requests for medical attention or any complaints about his physical condition during his time in detention? If so, provide the complete and unredacted logs or notes of each request, including the date and time they were made and an account of what action was taken in response.
2. What was Mr. Damas's medical history at the time of his intake into ICE custody? What conditions were identified and what treatment plan, if any, was established?
3. Did Mr. Damas receive an "initial dental screening exam . . . within 14 days" of his arrival into ICE custody, as required by standard 4.3 of ICE's national detention standards?
4. When did any staff at the Florence detention center first become aware of Mr. Damas's complaint regarding his tooth pain? When did medical staff become aware that Mr. Damas's condition required emergency treatment or admittance to a hospital?
5. Please provide a complete timeline of the dates that Mr. Damas was admitted to an outside medical facility or hospital for care.
6. Please clarify if Mr. Damas was returned to the Florence detention center after his initial hospitalization, as the family was told? If so, what was his condition when released? Was he placed in the medical unit at the Florence detention center?
7. Who was the medical provider contracted to deliver healthcare services at the Florence detention center at the time of Mr. Damas's death? Who was the medical provider contracted to deliver healthcare services at the outside facility or hospital where Mr. Damas was treated at the time of his death? Please provide any specific terms of those contracts.
8. What was the official cause of Mr. Damas's death? Was an independent autopsy conducted or made available to the family?

¹⁴ ACLU Florida, *Three deaths in ICE custody in just over a month of Trump's presidency marks the most deaths to occur in this fiscal year time period in five years* (Feb. 26, 2025), <https://www.aclufl.org/press-releases/three-deaths-ice-custody-just-over-month-trumps-presidency-marks-most-deaths-occur/>.

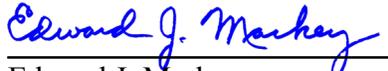
¹⁵ *Id.*; Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project, *Medical Neglect, Strip Searches, and Abuse: Deadly and Dehumanizing Conditions in the Eloy Detention Center*, https://firrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Final_December-2025_Deadly-and-Dehumanizing-Conditions-in-the-Eloy-Detention-Center_June-2024-thru-Nov-2025.pdf.

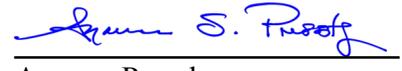
¹⁶ Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project, *supra* note 15.

9. Was Mr. Damas's family informed by any staff at the Florence detention center of his deteriorating health condition prior to his death? If so, when, by whom, and what information was provided? Why was the family given conflicting information about his location between February 20 and March 1?
10. Has ICE initiated a formal investigation into the death of Mr. Damas? If so, will the findings be made fully available to the family and the public?

Mr. Damas's family's pleas for information were met with silence, delays, and inadequate responses—they deserve a full accounting of what transpired to Mr. Damas. The American people also deserve transparency and accountability regarding the treatment of immigrants in our country.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator