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Detained immigrants launch hunger strike at Michigan ICE facility

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An aerial image of the North Lake Processing Center in Baldwin, Mich. is the largest U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention facility in the Midwest. With 1,800 beds, it's owned and operated by GEO Group, a private prison company that landed a federal contract to reopen the former prison in 2025. It's the only for-profit, private immigration detention center in Michigan.

Joel Bissell | MLive.com



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Editor's note: This story was updated Thursday, April 23 with a statement from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

BALDWIN, MI - Immigrants being held at the largest detention center in Michigan launched a hunger strike Monday, April 20, over living conditions and access to medical care at the facility, according to advocates and lawyers.

The strike at North Lake Processing Center, located in Baldwin, is also meant to protest federal policies that have kept immigrant detainees locked up indefinitely without bond.

"We demand competent doctors, better medical care — the food here is absolute garbage — and, above all, an end to the procedural delays we are suffering through inside these walls," said one anonymous immigrant detained at North Lake in a translated statement to the advocacy organization No Detention Centers Michigan.

The Michigan Immigrant Rights Center and two lawyers who have clients at North Lake also confirmed the hunger strike, when detainees refuse food as a form of protest, is underway. It follows others that have reportedly occurred at immigration detention centers in [Louisiana](#), [California](#) and [Florida](#).

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security denied claims of a hunger strike at North Lake.

"For the record: During hunger strikes, ICE continues to provide three meals a day, delivered to the detained alien's room, and an adequate supply of drinking water or other beverages," the agency said in a Thursday, April 23 statement.

North Lake is an 1,800-bed U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE, facility that was [opened by private prison firm](#) GEO Group last June. Since then, the population has swelled to 1,410 people under [President Donald Trump's](#) immigration crackdown.

It's unclear exactly how many North Lake detainees are on strike and how long it will last.

“It’s the result of the inhumane conditions that folks are being exposed to and the prolonged detention that so many individuals at North Lake have had to endure,” said Diana Marin, an attorney representing two people at the facility.

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About 40 people gathered outside the facility on Tuesday to support the detainees on strike, according to No Detention Centers Michigan.

GEO Group, when asked for comment, referred MLive to ICE for a statement.

The hunger strike is occurring after families, lawyers and advocates raised concerns about medical care at North Lake.

Records show staff at the facility [have called 911 dozens](#) of times for medical emergencies, with calls becoming more frequent after the population spiked last fall.

Related: [911 calls document health emergencies, suicide attempts at Michigan’s largest ICE detention center](#)

One detainee, Nenko Gantchev, a 56-year-old Bulgarian from Chicago, died at the facility in December. He was among 33 people who died in ICE custody last year across the country, the highest total in two decades. There have already been [17 deaths so far this year](#).

A medical examiner ruled last month that [Gantchev died from natural causes](#), but his family and lawmakers have questioned whether he got adequate medical care while in detention. ICE claims Gantchev entered custody with a [history of medical issues](#).

The death prompted [Democratic U.S. Reps. Hillary Scholten and Haley Stevens](#) to conduct a Congressional oversight visit of the facility in February.

“We are here today with still no answers about what happened to Mr. Gantchev, why he died here at this ICE processing facility in Baldwin, and we are going to continue to keep asking,” Stevens said at the time.

GEO Group previously told MLive it provides “high quality support services” in compliance with federal detention standards, including “around-the-clock” access to medical care.

DHS said any claims about “subprime conditions” at North Lake are false, and the agency provides “comprehensive medical care” to detainees including medical, dental, mental health services and 24-hour emergency care.

The North Lake hunger strike is also protesting immigrants being held without bond, according to advocates and lawyers, meaning they could remain in ICE detention for months, or even years, while their case moves through the courts.

In recent months, [thousands of immigrants](#) throughout the country have filed habeas corpus petitions in federal court to be released from ICE detention.

They are arguing they have been [locked up illegally](#) under a July 2025 directive that expanded what’s called “mandatory detention” to a much broader swath of immigrants. This previously only applied to those arrested at the U.S. border or immigrants convicted of serious crimes.

Related: [Mom locked up at big Michigan ICE facility fights detention with class-action suit](#)

Federal district court judges have overwhelmingly sided with immigrants, rejecting the policy and ordering the government to offer bond hearings or release detainees. Through mid-February, judges ruled more than 4,400 times that the federal government was detaining people illegally, [Reuters reported](#).

Despite that, lawyers say immigration judges are still rejecting bond.

In a recent case, a Venezuelan immigrant detained at North Lake filed a petition in March with the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan.

The man, from Ypsilanti, initially fought to get a bond a hearing in February. Once it was granted, court documents allege the Detroit Immigration Court denied his bond without providing “clear and convincing evidence” he was a flight risk.

U.S. District Court Judge Jane Beckering then ordered the federal government on April 21 to give the man another bond hearing before a “neutral immigration judge.”

The order came after the Trump administration has reportedly overhauled the immigration bench, which is an arm of the U.S. Department of Justice. It has pressured immigration judges to deport immigrants, dismissed 100 judges and appointed judges who previously worked as immigration prosecutors, [according to the New York Times](#).

“They’re just denying on flight risk without articulating the exact reasons why they’re finding flight risks,” said Joe Williams, an attorney with 70 clients at North Lake. “I’ve got three people who had U.S. citizen spouses, no criminal history, pending applications, every single box you can check. And they’re getting bond denied.”

Federal data shows that the percentage of ICE detainees being released on bond dropped last fall, going from 12% in April to 3% in October. It’s since ticked up to roughly 6% in March as average bond amounts hit nearly \$10,000. They hovered around \$7,000 last year.

Related: [As ICE arrests keep climbing in Michigan, most are not criminals](#)

Another North Lake detainee, who also remained anonymous, told No Detention Centers Michigan there is a feeling of “deep discontent” about the immigration court system.

“There are complaints regarding the lack of expediency in case processing, a lack of sound judgment and impartiality in judges’ rulings, the mass denial of cases, and a lack of legal aid,” a translated statement said.

The no-bond policy is currently being fought in federal appeals courts throughout the country, with several Michigan cases pending before the [6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals](#).

Marin says those on strike want to bring attention to the issue, and they want ICE to explain why they are being held when they have no criminal record and should be eligible for bond. About 85% of those detained at North Lake have no criminal convictions, federal data shows.

“This is an engineered situation and the only way to get out of it is if ICE changes their policies,” Marin said.

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