

Hunger Strike at Washington Detention Center Sparks The President's Interest

Article By:

Immigration & Compliance

On March 7, 2014, 750 of the 1300 detainees at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington went on a hunger strike. The strike turned attention to the United States immigration detention and deportation policies.

Paulino Ruiz, the detainee who ignited the hunger strike, was sick of eating boiled potatoes at every meal, receiving harsh treatment by the facilities guards, and making just \$1 per day for his work at the facility. Paulino Ruiz became a legal resident of the U.S. at the age of three. However, when he was released from prison last year after serving time for robbery, he was placed in deportation proceedings and placed in the Washington detention center.

Paulino Ruiz's efforts sparked The President's attention, and on March 13, 2013, The President ordered a review of the related immigration enforcement policies. The two enforcement policies under scrutiny are the Bed Mandate provision and the Mandatory Detention provision.

Under the Bed Mandate provision, taxpayers must pay to keep at least 34,000 people, like Paulino Ruiz, in detention centers, costing an estimated \$120 to \$160 per day for each detainee housed. In short, U.S. taxpayers paid \$2 billion in 2013 to keep immigrants detained. As noted by Ted Robbins, an NPR journalist, "there is no answer explaining why Congress placed the level at 34,000. It is seemingly arbitrary, and does not reflect the actual processes that go into putting an immigrant into detention or the actual need as determined by ICE. The bigger point is that the mandate restricts ICE's discretion to place many immigrants into alternatives to detention, which are less costly and more effective."

Under the Mandatory Detention provision, the Attorney General is required to place suspected immigration violators in detention while their deportation case is under review. The policy behind the provision is to ensure that immigrants placed in removal proceeding do not ignore court appearances or abscond from the government's radar.

It is unclear whether The President's review will cause any changes to these provisions. However, placing them in the spotlight is a darn good start...thank you Paulino Ruiz.

National Law Review, Volume IV, Number 98

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/hunger-strike-washington-detention-center-sparks-president-s-interest>