

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 6, 2026

Joseph V. Cuffari
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Inspector General Cuffari:

We seek an accounting of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) failure to ensure transparency surrounding where people in its custody are taken and held. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has long maintained an online detainee locator system (ODLS) "so that family members and attorneys can locate detainees more easily online, 24 hours a day, seven days a week."¹ But since January 2025, that system has grown increasingly unreliable. Without a functional locator system, DHS is effectively creating "disappearances" on U.S. soil, and we urge the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) to investigate this matter.

ICE created the ODLS in 2010 with the intent to allow the public to determine whether a person is in ICE custody and, if so, at which facility.² Prior to the Trump Administration, ICE maintained a practice of adding adults in its custody to the record locator within eight hours of their arrival at an ICE facility.³ Customs and Border Protection (CBP) also uses ICE's ODLS and has generally added individuals to the system after 48 hours in CBP custody.⁴

However, reports now indicate that many detained individuals are not showing up in the online detainee locator system in a timely fashion, if at all.⁵ Families and legal representatives have reported that the system can now "take two to three days or longer" to update — and sometimes weeks.⁶ Congressional offices have similarly reported trouble locating constituents in ICE and

¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Online Detainee Locator System," June 2010, https://courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/courts/default/2024-12/btb_xxii_ig_7.pdf.

² U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Privacy Impact Assessment for the Online Detainee Locator System," July 16, 2025, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/25_0716_priv_pia-ice-019-odls.pdf; American Immigration Lawyers Associations, "ICE Announces Launch of Online Detainee Locator System," July 23, 2010, <https://www.aiala.org/library/ice-launch-of-online-detainee-locator-system>.

³ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "About the Detainee Locator / FAQs," <https://locator.ice.gov/odls/#/about?includeCBP=true&moreInfoNoResults=https:%2F%2Fwww.cbp.gov%2Fborder-security%2Falong-us-borders%2Fmissing-migrant-program>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ American Immigration Council, "New Report Details ICE's Expanding and Increasingly Unaccountable Detention System," Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, January 23, 2026, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/ice-expanding-detention-system/>; 9 News, "ICE detainees vanish from tracking system, leaving families in desperation," Angeline McCall, February 25, 2026, <https://www.9news.com/article/news/local/ice-detainees-vanish-from-tracking-system-colorado/73-840a7e57-c409-46d5-8297-1bfe8659179c>.

⁶ NJ Spotlight News, "It's hard to keep track of ICE detainees, families say, adding to distress," Taylor Jung, March 11, 2025, <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2025/03/ice-detainee-families-say-heightened-stress-as-difficult-track->

CBP custody.⁷ In some cases, individuals are deported before their location is ever added to the online locator system.⁸

At times, detained individuals cannot be located because the information in the ODLS is inaccurate. For example, one “35-year-old Cuban man could not be located at the California detention facility where U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said they had sent him, leaving his family and attorney frantically trying to determine where he was for more than a week.”⁹ There have been similar anecdotal reports of the locator showing that a person is detained at a particular detention center yet facility contractors telling attorneys the individual is not at that facility.¹⁰ In other cases, it appears that detainees are not being added to the ODLS at all.¹¹

This emerging problem appears to be driven by several factors, including:

- **Scale of detention:** Part of the problem appears to be the sheer scale of detention: there are currently more than 70,000 people in ICE custody, compared to around 39,000 as of December 2024, and the Trump Administration aims to reach a detention bed capacity of over 90,000.¹² Expanding to detain over *80 percent* more people over just one year appears to have strained ICE’s systems, including ICE’s ability to update the ODLS.¹³
- **Number of transfers:** ICE is transferring people between facilities more often than in past years — with a transfer rate more than *double* what it was in 2024 — introducing more errors into the system.¹⁴ ICE also appears to have changed how the ODLS handles

detainees-in-system/; Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2241, Rigoberto Hernandez Hernandez v. U.S. Border Patrol et al., September 19, 2025, 3:25-cv-05842, p. 4, <https://nwirp.org/our-work/impact-litigation/assets/hernandez/01%20Rigoberto%20Hernandez%20pet%20for%20writ%20of%20habeas.pdf>.

⁷ Reports on file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren.

⁸ See, e.g., MEMORANDUM OF LAW IN OPPOSITION TO RESPONDENTS’ MOTION TO DISMISS at 5, Lopez Belloza v. Hyde, 1:25-cv-13499, March 5, 2026, D. Mass.

⁹ Miami Herald, “Hundreds of Alligator Alcatraz detainees drop off the grid after leaving site,” Ben Wieder and Shirsho Dasgupta, September 15, 2025, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article312042943.html>.

¹⁰ Reports on file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren.

¹¹ Associated Press News, “Immigrants disappear from US detainee tracking system after deportation flights,” Joshua Goodman and Gisela Salomon, March 19, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-deportations-gang-venezuela-0cf2c3a26d7f4bafa87ad6ca5a640313>; The Washington Post, “They were arrested during routine ICE check-ins. Then they disappeared,” Arelis R. Hernández and María Luisa Paúl, March 22, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/03/22/trump-venezuela-migrants-el-salvador/>; Project Censored, “Detainees Missing from ICE Database after Entering Alligator Alcatraz,” Andy Duncan and Trinity Hillegas, December 9, 2025, <https://www.projectcensored.org/detainees-missing-ice-alligator-alcatraz/>.

¹² CBS News, “ICE’s detainee population reaches new record high of 73,000, as crackdown widens,” Camilo Montoya-Galvez, January 16, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ices-detainee-population-record-high-of-73000/>; American Immigration Lawyers Association, “Featured Issue: Immigration Detention and Alternatives to Detention,” March 14, 2025, <https://www.aila.org/library/featured-issue-immigration-detention-and-alternatives-to-detention>; Associated Press News, “Immigration officials plan to spend \$38.3 billion to boost detention capacity to 92,000 beds,” Heather Hollingsworth, February 13, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/ice-detention-facilities-expansion-warehouses-c61c3e23c4246e94a760b4d979cb9c48>.

¹³ The Hill, “Enforcement is not punishment: ICE must stop treating immigrations like criminals,” Veronica Cardenas, March 16, 2026, <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/5783389-ice-detention-centers-surge/>.

¹⁴ Human Rights First, “ICE Flight Monitor,” January 2026, p. 4, https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/UPDATE_January-2026-ICE-Flight-Monitor-Report-1.pdf; Los Angeles Times, “How ICE detainees are moved miles away from families and attorneys,” Gabrielle

the locations of individuals in the process of being transferred between facilities. Under ICE policy, the ODLS would traditionally “show that the detainee is in custody at the original facility until the detainee has arrived and been booked into the new facility.”¹⁵ Now, however, individuals “in transit” often do not show up in the system at all — sometimes for days at a time.¹⁶ And in cases where the ODLS says to contact the local field office to determine a person’s location, the field office is often unreachable.¹⁷

- ***Systematic failures at new facilities:*** There appear to be systemic ODLS failures for individuals held in this Administration’s new unconventional detention settings, which so far include military bases, ICE field offices, and state-run facilities, and may soon include warehouses built for storing packages.¹⁸ For example, individuals detained at Florida’s “Alligator Alcatraz” facility “frequently do not show up in the ICE online locator system.”¹⁹ Reporters could not determine “the whereabouts of two-thirds of more than 1,800 men detained during the month of July at ‘Alligator Alcatraz’”²⁰ and the ODLS system simply said “‘Call ICE for details.’”²¹ Similarly, ICE field offices and CBP stations — which traditionally held detainees for just hours but are now being used to detain people for days or weeks — have failed to add individuals to the ODLS in a timely manner.²² According to reports, “[s]everal attorneys [have] recounted being unable to confirm with federal agencies that their clients were in fact detained in the locations, sometimes for days.”²³

LaMarr LeMee, September 26, 2025, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2025-09-26/faster-more-frequent-transfers-of-immigrant-ice-detainees-sow-fear-and-cut-off-resources>.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Privacy Impact Assessment for the Online Detainee Locator System,” July 16, 2025, p. 3 n.5, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/25_0716_priv_pia-ice-019-odls.pdf; Times Union, “‘No one knows what’s happening inside’: Migrants languish in ICE, Border Patrol temporary hold rooms in New York,” Emilie Munson and Esther Sun, October 12, 2025, <https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/migrants-languish-ice-border-patrol-hold-rooms-21087088.php>.

¹⁶ Petition for Writ for Habeas Corpus, *Lopez v. Trump*, 25-cv-04826, S.D.N.Y., June 9, 2025, https://habeasdockets.org/media/documents/70479287/004_127037662981-21d0cd049b59.pdf.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Class Action Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief at 14, *Barco Mercado v. Noem*, 1:25-cv-06568 (Aug. 8, 2025, S.D.N.Y.), <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/federal-plaza-conditions-ice-lawsuit-nyc.pdf>.

¹⁸ PBS News, “ICE spending billions to turn warehouses into migrant detention facilities,” Liz Landers and Doug Adams, February 27, 2026, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ice-spending-billions-to-turn-warehouses-into-migrant-detention-facilities>; National Public Radio, “Military bases in New Jersey and Indiana will be expanded to detain immigrants, Ximena Bustillo and Tom Bowman, July 21, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/21/nx-s1-5475109/immigrant-detention-military-bases>; CBS News, “ICE’s detainee population reaches new record high of 73,000, as crackdown widens,” Camilo Montoya-Galvez, January 16, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ices-detainee-population-record-high-of-73000/>.

¹⁹ Tallahassee Democrat, “‘Deportation Depot’ opens in Florida, but detainees go unlisted,” Ana Goni-Lessan, September 15, 2025, <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/local/state/2025/09/15/ice-expands-detention-in-florida-but-withholds-detainee-data/86112680007/>.

²⁰ Miami Herald, “Hundreds of Alligator Alcatraz detainees drop off the grid after leaving site,” Ben Wieder and Shirsho Dasgupta, January 5, 2026, <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article312042943.html>.

²¹ Tallahassee Democrat, “‘Deportation Depot’ opens in Florida, but detainees go unlisted,” Ana Goni-Lessan, September 15, 2025, <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/local/state/2025/09/15/ice-expands-detention-in-florida-but-withholds-detainee-data/86112680007/>.

²² The Guardian, “Revealed: ICE violates its own policy by holding people in secretive rooms for days or weeks,” José Olivares and Will Craft, October 30, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/oct/30/ice-hidden-detention-sites>.

When individuals in DHS custody cannot be located, their legal representation suffers. Attorneys have reported not knowing where to file a habeas petition because they do not know where their clients are located.²⁴ Furthermore, detained clients face increased risk of missing court hearings²⁵ or missing case deadlines when their attorneys cannot find them.²⁶

Families also suffer. Many have reported the terror of not knowing whether their loved one is even still in the United States.²⁷ The ODLS does not show if the person has been removed from the country,²⁸ and with no information about transfers, there is no way to tell whether a person is “in the middle of a transfer between two sites or about to be deported.”²⁹ Some families have reported that, by the time their loved one is found, they have already been deported.³⁰ The inability to locate loved ones and clients is compounded by problems with ICE’s phone system in detention, with detained individuals increasingly reporting that they are not being permitted to make phone calls during their detention.³¹ Meanwhile, legal aid providers report being unable to reach ICE field offices when they call, even when the ODLS directs them to call the field office.³²

²³ Times Union, “‘No one knows what’s happening inside’: Migrants languish in ICE, Border Patrol temporary hold rooms in New York,” Emilie Munson and Esther Sun, October 12, 2025, <https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/migrants-languish-ice-border-patrol-hold-rooms-21087088.php>.

²⁴ Memorandum of Law in Opposition to Respondents’ Motion to Dismiss at 1, *Belloza v. Hyde*, 25-cv-13499, D. Mass., March 5, 2026.

²⁵ Los Angeles Times, “How ICE detainees are moved miles away from families and attorneys,” Gabrielle LaMarr LeMee, September 26, 2025, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2025-09-26/faster-more-frequent-transfers-of-immigrant-ice-detainees-sow-fear-and-cut-off-resources>.

²⁶ Reports on file with the Office of U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren.

²⁷ Human Rights First, “ICE Flight Monitor,” October 2025, https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/ICE-Flight-Monitor_Report_Oct2025.pdf; NJ Spotlight News, “It’s hard to keep track of ICE detainees, families say, adding to distress,” Taylor Jung, March 11, 2025, <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2025/03/ice-detainee-families-say-heightened-stress-as-difficult-track-detainees-in-system/>.

²⁸ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, “About the Detainee Locator / FAQs,” <https://locator.ice.gov/odls/#/about?includeCBP=true&moreInfoNoResults=https:%2F%2Fwww.cbp.gov%2Fborder-security%2Falong-us-borders%2Fmissing-migrant-program>.

²⁹ Miami Herald, “Hundreds of Alligator Alcatraz detainees drop off the grid after leaving site,” Ben Wieder and Shirsho Dasgupta, September 16, 2025, https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/immigration/article_312042943.html.

³⁰ American Friends Service Committee, “Searching for family, documenting for immigrant justice,” Diana Flores, November 12, 2025, <https://afsc.org/news/searching-family-documenting-immigrant-justice>.

³¹ New York Focus, “ICE Detainees in New York Jails Can’t Talk to Their Lawyers,” Julia Rock and Isabelle Taft, October 6, 2025, <https://nysfocus.com/2025/10/06/ice-detention-jails-legal-phone-access-new-york>; Newsday, “Long Island relatives of ICE detainees wait for phone calls rarely made,” Bart Jones, September 22, 2025, <https://www.newsday.com/long-island/ice-detainees-long-island-immigration-xmqnpmp7>; ABC 7 Chicago, “Family fights for man’s release from ICE custody, details conditions at Broadview facility,” Mark Rivera, Barb Markoff, Christine Tressel, and Tom Jones, October 21, 2025, <https://abc7chicago.com/post/family-fights-fathers-release-ice-custody-crestwood-arrest-details-conditions-broadview-facility/18053713/>; The Latin Times, “Man Detained by ICE Shows ‘Inhumane’ Conditions Inside Miami Detention Center as He Pleads for Help: ‘This Is Not a Joke’,” Taylor Odisho, March 19, 2025, <https://www.latintimes.com/man-detained-ice-shows-inhumane-conditions-inside-miami-detention-center-he-pleads-help-this-578818>.

³² Bloomberg Law, “Lawyers Fight ICE for Access: ‘I Want to Hear My Client’s Voice’,” Beth Wang, Maia Spoto, and Megan Crepeau, January 30, 2026, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/litigation/lawyers-fight-ice-for-access-i-want-to-hear-my-clients-voice>; ABC News, “Lawyers allege Dept. of Homeland Security is denying legal counsel to Minnesota detainees,” Matt Rivers, Janice McDonald, and Armando Garcia,

Some experts worry that these issues could even be intentional, alleging that ICE uses “bureaucracy and location transfers to isolate their detainees from both their families and their lawyers,”³³ or to remove them from jurisdictions with more protective laws or more favorable judges. These concerns are not unfounded. For example, one ICE agent reportedly commented to a detainee that she was being transferred from California to Indiana “thanks to the laws in California.”³⁴

To understand the full scope of this problem, the reasons for the ODLS’s reporting gaps, and the impacts of these gaps on detainees and their families, we request that your office conduct an evaluation of this matter, including by addressing the following questions:

1. Has the ODLS system suffered a reduction in timeliness and reliability since January 2025?
 - a. If so, what are the primary reasons for these problems?
 - b. To the extent that there has been a reduction in timeliness and reliability, how has this affected detainees’ legal rights, including access to counsel and ability to file legal documents?
 - c. How quickly was the ODLS updated before January 2025 and how quickly has it been updated since January 2025?
2. What types of location information do ICE or CBP maintain that the agencies do not add to the ODLS?
 - a. What types of facilities are excluded from showing up in ODLS results, and why?
 - b. Over the past year, what was the median hold time for each type of facility excluded from the ODLS?
 - c. What other mechanisms, if any, are available for attorneys and family members to know where a client or loved one is being detained if the person is not added to the ODLS?
3. What offices within ICE and CBP are charged with maintaining ODLS updates?
 - a. How many full-time equivalent employees work on ODLS updates?
4. Does ICE track how long it takes for booking information to be transmitted to the ODLS?
 - a. If so, what is the average transmission time?
5. What is the median response time to phone calls for each ICE field office that detains individuals overnight?

January 18, 2026, <https://abcnews.com/US/lawyers-allege-dept-homeland-security-denying-legal-counsel/story?id=129335914>; New York Focus, “ICE Detainees in New York Jails Can’t Talk to Their Lawyers,” Julia Rock and Isabelle Taft, October 6, 2025, <https://nysfocus.com/2025/10/06/ice-detention-jails-legal-phone-access-new-york>.

³³ The American Prospect, “How ICE Hides Detainees From Their Lawyers,” Emma Janssen, October 6, 2025, <https://prospect.org/2025/10/06/2025-10-06-how-ice-hides-detainees-from-their-lawyers/>.

³⁴ Los Angeles Times, “How ICE detainees are moved miles away from families and attorneys,” Gabrielle LaMarr LeMee, September 26, 2025, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2025-09-26/faster-more-frequent-transfers-of-immigrant-ice-detainees-sow-fear-and-cut-off-resources>.

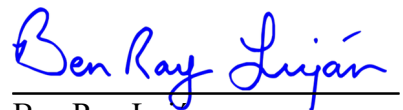
6. What guidance do ICE and CBP provide for staff on use of the ODLS?
 - a. What, if any, updates have been made to this guidance since January 20, 2025?
7. Under what circumstances does ICE use “Call ICE for Details” or “Call Field Office” in the ODLS, and under what circumstances did ICE use those responses before January 20, 2025?
8. What guidance or practices does ICE have for updating location information for individuals in ICE custody who are not at detention centers, including those at field offices and hospitals?
9. What guidance or practices do ICE and CBP follow for updating location information for individuals in their custody who are being transferred between facilities?
 - a. Specifically, has ICE or CBP provided guidance to its agents about not updating the ODLS until a person has arrived at their “final destination”? Please share a copy of any such guidance.
10. Does the ODLS show the location of individuals detained by or on behalf of ICE at:
 - a. Overseas military bases, including Guantanamo Bay;
 - b. Domestic military bases;
 - c. State-run immigration detention facilities;
 - d. ICE field offices.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



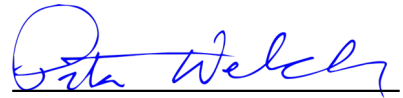
Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



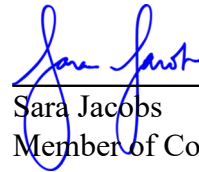
Gwen S. Moore
Member of Congress



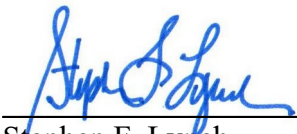
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress



Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



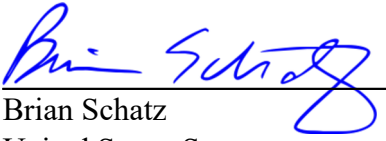
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



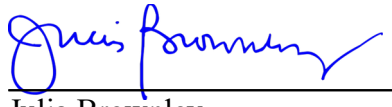
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

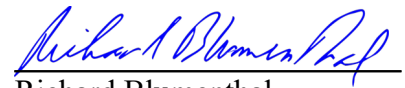


Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress

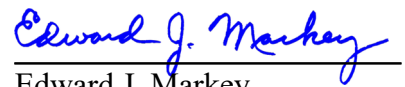

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

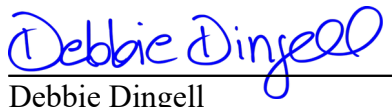

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

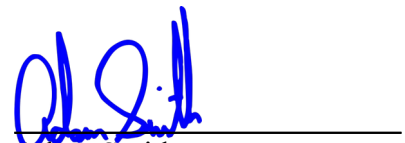

Julia Brownley
Member of Congress


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator


Jacky Rosen
United States Senator


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress

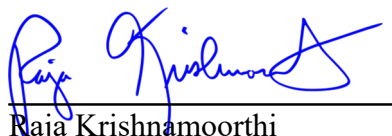

Adam Smith
Member of Congress

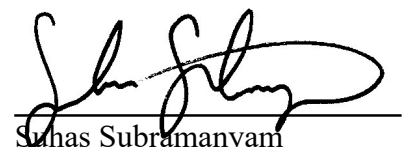

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress


Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator


Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress

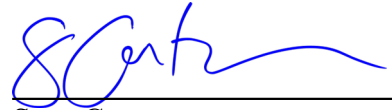

Greg Stanton
Member of Congress


Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress


Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress