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## “This Jail is Full of Horrors”: Detained Immigrants Report Continued Retaliation, Medical Neglect, Racist Abuse and Deplorable Conditions at New York Jail

*Due to alleged ongoing violations, immigrant rights organizations file supplement to DHS civil rights complaint against Orange County Correctional Facility in Goshen, NY*

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April 20, 2022, Goshen, N.Y. – Today, six immigrant rights organizations [supplemented](#) a [February 2022 complaint](#) with the Department for Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL), further documenting persistent human rights abuses at Orange County Correctional Facility (OCCF) in Goshen, New York, and calling on DHS to remove officers named in the complaint, immediately release all detained immigrants and terminate its contract with OCCF. Despite being on notice over two months ago, DHS and OCCF have failed to take any accountability for the deplorable abuses experienced by people detained at the facility.

When detained immigrants participated in a hunger strike in mid-February, OCCF attempted to chill their protected First Amendment activity through retaliatory punishment. “The jail treated us terribly during the hunger strike,” said “**Ernesto.**”<sup>1</sup> “[The guards] cuffed us to search our bodies and make sure we did not have any food hidden on us. They even took away items like sheets, towels, shirts and shoes. . . . After the strike, those of us who participated received a seven-day lock-in as punishment.”

Racist abuse reportedly remains rampant at OCCF. Although OCCF moved two of the officers named in the complaint out of the ICE unit after the February complaint was filed, Orange County Undersheriff Kenneth Jones characterized the move as “standard procedure,” dismissing concerns about the presence of racist, extremist officers at OCCF as “unfounded and malicious . . . .” Yet the reshuffling has made no impression on the culture of racism endemic to OCCF. “The guards continue to mistreat us,” said “**Cristian.**” “The only thing that has changed is that some of the officers were swapped out for new ones. . . . The new guards are racist, too.” In fact, the supplement names eight additional officers who have reportedly abused their power. Detained people describe a culture of impunity, wherein OCCF officers frustrate reporting and do not face repercussions for violating immigrants’ rights. “This jail is full of horrors, and nobody faces any consequences,” said “**Oliver.**”

“For over two months, DHS and OCCF have been aware of the abhorrent human rights violations taking place at Orange County Correctional Facility. And yet, we have seen absolutely no action,”

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<sup>1</sup> All names in quotation marks are pseudonyms for people currently or formerly detained at OCCF.

said **Tania Mattos, Director of Advocacy and Policy at Envision Freedom Fund.** “Immigrants detained at OCCF have bravely shared their complaints - forgoing food and facing intense retaliation in order to shine a light on the dark practices and gross misconduct occurring inside the detention facility. This cycle further proves that the only way to truly disrupt the violence inside is to immediately release all detained immigrants and close OCCF.”

“The people held at OCCJ continue to be subject to unconscionable human right abuses, including racial and religious discrimination, severe medical neglect, and retaliation in the form of physical assault and solitary confinement,” said **Cynthia Galaz, Senior Policy Associate with Freedom for Immigrants.** “It’s clear that the mistreatment at OCCF has only grown since February, proving that this immigration detention center is beyond the reach of reform. It’s past time that New York got out of the inhumane business of detention in Goshen and across the state. Now is the time to prioritize New York immigrant communities over the immigration detention system, which is rife with abuse across the board.”

Detained people also report continued medical neglect. “We fill out sick call after sick call; it feels like we have to beg to get medical care,” said **“Benjamin.”** After suffering a serious injury while working for OCCF, **“Oliver”** was moved to the medical unit. There, he reported, “Although the jail staff told me the purpose of being in the medical unit was so my condition could be monitored, I have not been able to access treatment . . . .”

"Immigration facilities' lack of adequate medical and mental healthcare has resulted in serious harm to people in detention," explained **Dr. Kate Sugarman, board certified family medicine physician and Steering Committee member of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest’s volunteer Medical Providers Network.** “The resulting hunger strikes reflect the sheer desperation for relief and improved conditions. ICE needs to follow the directives of many public health experts and release everyone from its custody.”

Despite promises from DHS that conditions at OCCF would improve if the hunger strike ended, detained people describe still being served inedible food, among other inhumane conditions. “Since the hunger strike ended, the food has gotten even worse,” said **“Felix.”** “We get bologna, pasta that is cold and congealed and a hamburger bun cut in half. . . . [M]any of us rely on commissary to get enough food to eat. . . . [W]e have to buy food or else we go hungry.”

The groups continue to call on DHS to take immediate action to address the abuses at OCCF, while also urging New York State to pass the Dignity Not Detention Act. “This vital legislation will help to ensure the release of all detained immigrants and the closure of OCCF,” explained **Tania Mattos.** “Ending immigration detention in New York State is necessary in order to catch up with other states, repair New York’s moral conscience and rebuild trust with immigrant communities.”

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