

# THE TRUTH BEHIND THESE WALLS

## A COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

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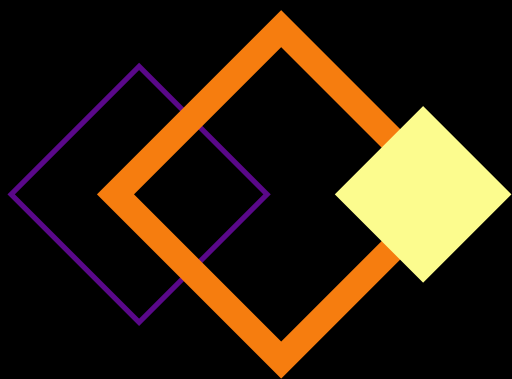
SHUT DOWN GEO COALITION



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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|                                            |           |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Purpose .....</b>                       | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>What is GEO? .....</b>                  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>A Look Inside .....</b>                 | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Medical Concerns .....</b>              | <b>6</b>  |
| • Insufficient Medical Care .....          | 7         |
| • Extreme Temperatures .....               | 8         |
| <b>Food Insecurity .....</b>               | <b>9</b>  |
| • Nutritional Neglect .....                | 10        |
| • “Sign or Starve” .....                   | 10        |
| <b>Guard Behavior .....</b>                | <b>11</b> |
| • Insufficient Training and Policies ..... | 12        |
| • A System of Stress .....                 | 12        |
| • Failure to Intervene .....               | 12        |
| <b>Living Conditions .....</b>             | <b>13</b> |
| • North vs. South Annex .....              | 14        |
| • Restricted Daily Life .....              | 14        |
| • A Stressful Environment .....            | 15        |
| • Deteriorating Mental Health .....        | 15        |
| • Limited Visitor Access .....             | 16        |
| <b>Our Demands .....</b>                   | <b>17</b> |
| <b>Community Calls to Action .....</b>     | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgment .....</b>                | <b>19</b> |
| <b>References .....</b>                    | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Media Requests .....</b>                | <b>21</b> |



# PURPOSE

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The purpose of this report is to draw attention to the conditions inside the Aurora GEO Immigration Detention Center. Immigration detention should not be a necessary part of the immigration process. Immigrants deserve to fight their immigration cases among the community, with social-emotional support, and with access to legal resources. The same dollars that fund immigrant detention could better be used to serve and support all communities. With this, it is also critical to understand the detention landscape across the United States. Unfortunately, the Aurora facility is the facility people would rather be placed in when they have experienced the conditions of other detention centers across the country.

This detention center elicits many areas of concern. Based on what we have heard from those impacted by immigrant detention, we have highlighted the following categories; medical concerns, food insecurity, guard behavior, and living conditions. These categories represent the issues that are most highly reported.



# WHAT IS GEO?

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The Denver Contract Detention Facility is also referred to in this report as Aurora GEO Immigration Detention Center and Aurora GEO. This is a for-profit immigrant detention facility located in Aurora, Colorado.

The GEO Group is the private prison company that owns this facility, profiting off the detention of immigrants, the majority of whom do not have criminal records (“Trac Immigration,” 2025).

This facility was contracted in 1987, marking the first time GEO Group won a federal government contract (“Freedom for Immigrants,” 2024). This facility holds both men and women over the age of 18.

Aurora GEO has a 1,532 bed capacity with a 1,142 average (“TRAC at Work,” 2025). Each bed that is filled is more money in the pockets of investors and shareholders.

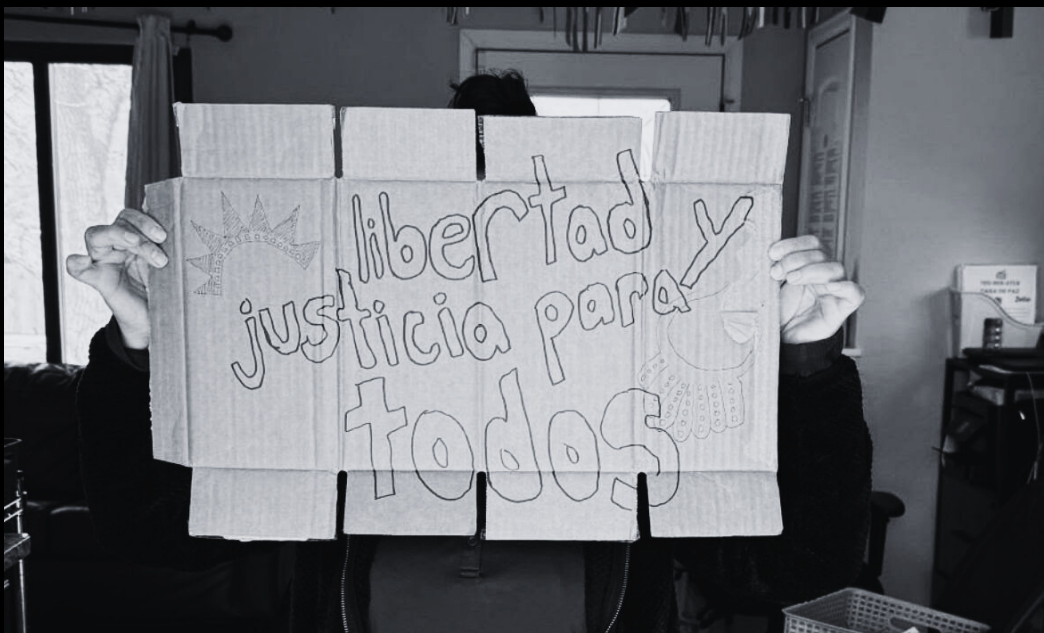
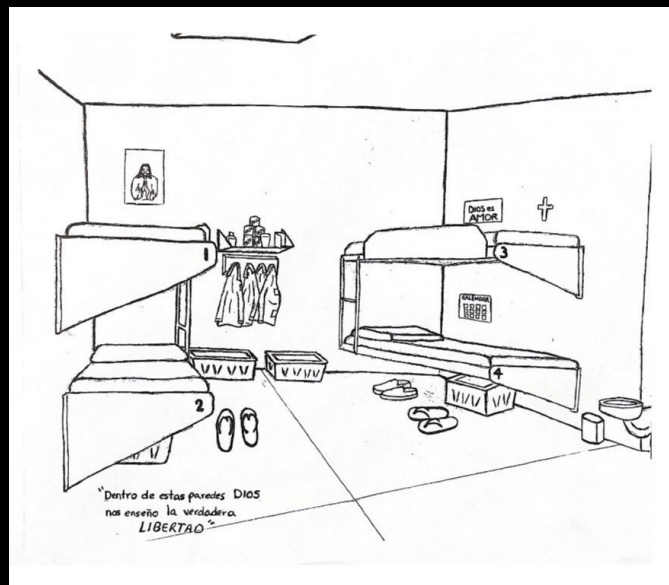


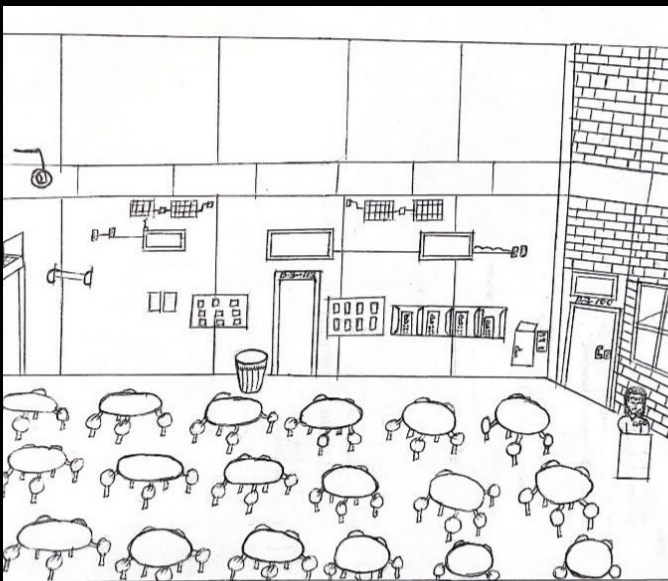
Photo Credit: Casa de Paz

# A LOOK INSIDE

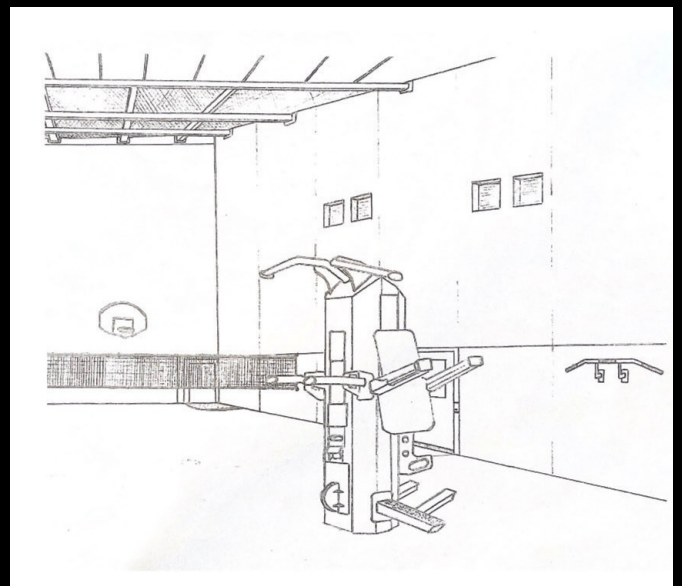
These photos were drawn in 2023 by an individual during his time in detention. In his home country, he worked as an architectural engineer. He used the drawing skills he learned through his work to accurately depict what it looks like inside the men's dorms on the North Side of Aurora GEO.



Cells in the North



North Common Area



Indoor Recreation Space

# MEDICAL CONCERNS

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Reports coming from those detained within this facility cite delays in receiving medical care due to a lack of adequate resources and limited medical staffing, as well as extreme temperatures leading to illness.

## **Insufficient Medical Care**

Several individuals who are detained have reported that it takes at least three days to see a medical staff member. When describing the wait times, one individual said, “You could be dying and you wouldn’t know.”

In August 2025, a woman who had sent in five requests for care was told that there was only one doctor available for the whole facility.

In July and August 2025, those detained reported long wait times and denied requests to see a dentist.

When individuals are sick, they have reported receiving only Tylenol. Others report having their prescribed medications withheld or thrown out.

For those with preexisting medical conditions, there is often a delay in receiving medical care, and there is often no access to specialists.

It has been reported that individuals with Lyme disease have been denied requests to see specialists and medication for their condition.

One woman who was detained for over a year reports being diagnosed with cancer shortly after her detention. They were brought to the hospital, but were provided with incorrect imaging and reports. She was given reports from a woman with a uterus, which she does not have.

Inside the detention center, there is inadequate care for pregnant and expecting mothers. In the past, this led to pregnant women being released back into the community. Currently, several individuals in various stages of pregnancy are detained.

## Extreme Temperatures

From May to August 2025, people reported that the temperatures in the holding area, where people are located while being processed, were cold and unbearable.

People report that the temperatures in holding areas have led to illness that has spread throughout the facility.

In July 2025, an AC outage affected parts of the building, resulting in extremely hot temperatures throughout the facility. People reported that guards were keeping doors shut in an attempt to maintain low temperatures. Some of those who were detained were provided with ice packs to cool themselves down.

In August 2025, it was reported that temperatures throughout the facility are so cold that officers often wear jackets during the day to stay warm.

No extra layers are given out and can only be purchased from commissary.



# FOOD INSECURITY

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Individuals who are detained report being denied access to protein-rich and nutrient-dense foods, with some alleging that food was withheld as coercion for refusing to sign documents.

## **Nutritional Neglect**

People being held at Aurora GEO report significant weight loss while in detention. This is something that Casa de Paz has historically seen and heard from people as they are released. This past year, an individual who was detained for four months in Aurora GEO reported losing over forty pounds due to food insecurity.

Some individuals have stated that they would rather fast than eat the provided food, as it is unappetizing and not nutritious.

Keeping track of which pods, or housing sections, get what food is a challenge. About six months ago, those detained reported receiving protein, such as chicken, about three times a week. A few months ago, we received reports of an unappealing soy protein substitute being provided instead of meat. Currently, those in detention report that protein is served inconsistently and is often in small portions that are unappetizing.

In July 2025, the most common meals served included cereal, oatmeal, and beans. During this period, an individual reported that over their eight months in detention, the only fresh fruit they received was one apple.

When those detained desire more nutritious or filling foods, their only option is purchasing these items from the commissary. These items are expensive. The commissary system is also complex and often has glitches with higher fees than regular money orders.

## **“Sign or Starve”**

In August 2025, there were reports from individuals who stated that they were denied food from 7 am to 7 pm as a consequence of not signing documents or deportation orders. These individuals include those who had pending court dates and requests for legal support.

# GUARD BEHAVIOR

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Those detained allege that staff members are often inadequately trained or lack sufficient knowledge, and that they frequently turn a blind eye to altercations or disturbances occurring within the facility.

## **Insufficient Training and Policies**

Those detained report that the staff at the Aurora GEO Facility are unhelpful, not providing support with requests, nor explaining the documents that are being handed out.

Both volunteers and those detained report a high rate of turnover without a strong onboarding process. There is often confusion regarding policies among those who work at the facility. This leads to people being told different things by different guards and people being released with incorrect paperwork.

While not all interactions with officers are negative, there have been reports over the last few years that people detained who speak English are treated “better” than those who do not speak English.

## **A System of Stress**

In the past, people have been notified days before they were deported. Currently, individuals are called for deportations in the middle of the night. It has been reported that this occurs around 2- 3 am. In addition, the schedule for deportations is constantly changing. As a result, many of those detained do not sleep through the night as they are waiting for their name to be called.

## **Failure to Intervene**

When fights occur, those detained have reported that guards have been noted to stand by and watch, not trying to break up the fight.

# LIVING CONDITIONS

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Detention is an isolating experience, marked by limited activities and minimal access to outdoor recreation. Combined with the stress of ongoing legal proceedings and interpersonal conflicts, people report that this environment has contributed to a decline in their mental health.

## **North vs. South Annex**

Based on the information provided by those who have been detained, each cell on the north side of the facility has four beds and one toilet. The lack of private bathroom access and the small space often causes a smell of feces. Others detained in the north report that they are regularly locked in their cells for hours, and they always have to be in their room for headcount.

In August 2025, a man housed in one of the B Pod sections on the north side of the facility reported that he was housed with around 30 people. He reports that is how many people that specific section is designed to hold.

In contrast, those living in the south annex report that they have bathrooms far from where they sleep. This side does not smell like feces, and those detained only need to be at their beds for headcount.

## **Restricted Daily Life**

Those detained have reported that the only activities available to them often include coloring, listening to music, reading, exercising, praying, and watching television. They report that this routine becomes exhausting and has negative effects on their mental health.

Those detained report limited access to recreational and outdoor spaces due to guard reassignments. They report that the recreation officer is often reassigned to a north area of the building.

Since March 2025, those who are detained report that on days when people are deported, there is restricted phone access. Reports indicate that sometimes phone access is cut off until 3 pm, while other times phones are not available for the entire day. Those detained report that the numbers of their lawyers and family members are sometimes blocked from calling. Other times, those detained are not notified when someone calls.

## **A Stressful Environment**

There are reports that fights break out in detention due to the lack of basic necessities available. People report that at times, this scarcity causes people to steal from each other. Those in detention cite not getting items, even when they have gone through the correct methods of requesting them.

Testimonies also include hearing guards joke around, clanking their keys, and slamming doors at late hours of the night, making it difficult to sleep.

## **Deteriorating Mental Health**

Depression and lack of mental health services for those detained are of huge concern. People often report that the longer they spend in this facility, the more depressed they become. In addition, there is a common sense of hopelessness within the facility. In the past year, those detained have reported multiple suicide attempts.

Some individuals have reported signing self-deportation orders only to be transferred to another detention facility. Others have reported long wait times between winning their cases and their release. This had led to increased anxiety and uncertainty.

## Limited Visitor Access

Since the escape of two individuals who were detained in March 2025, there have been reports of headcounts happening four times per day. As a result, family and legal visits are often delayed or unable to take place. This has limited access to legal resources and family support.

When the facility is not in lockdown, the guards have been fairly cooperative, trying to work with families to help them see their loved ones.

This detention center used to have access to Know Your Rights presentations. These presentations were eliminated in 2025.

Visitation by outside organizations and volunteers, such as those through Casa de Paz, helps to improve morale among those detained by providing something for them to look forward to.



# OUR DEMANDS

## AS THE SHUT DOWN GEO COALITION

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### **Congressional Delegation**

- Take a public stand against detention
- Use your legislative power to tell both your colleagues and constituents that you are against immigrant detention and expansion
- Work to shrink the budget for detention
- Demand accountability from entities that spend taxpayer dollars on detention that dehumanizes immigrants and enriches corporate stockholders
- Join our call to FREE THEM ALL, officially endorse the Shut Down GEO campaign

### **State Elected Officials**

- Take a public stand against detention
- Ensure legally mandated reports are being completed
- Put pressure on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to complete surprise inspections
- Mandate the Attorney General's office review and report on immigration detention facilities operating in Colorado
- Join our call to FREE THEM ALL, officially endorse the Shut Down GEO campaign

### **Aurora Mayor and City Council**

- Take a public stand against detention
- Put pressure on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment to complete surprise inspections
- Make sure that local zoning laws, city ordinances, and public health regulations are being met
- Join our call to FREE THEM ALL, officially endorse the Shut Down GEO campaign

# CALLS TO ACTION

## FOR OUR COMMUNITY

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### Join Our Call to FREE THEM ALL

- Endorse the Shut Down GEO Campaign
- Speak out about detention within your community

### Demand Accountability From Your Government Leaders

- Reach out to your local and national level representatives
- Use our email templates to contact your elected officials
- Call your elected officials regularly and share our demands

### Support Our Local Community

- Share our posts highlighting the conditions within detention
- Attend our weekly vigils and learn more from those directly impacted by detention
- Donate to organizations directly supporting immigrants detained at Aurora GEO, such as Casa de Paz, AFSC, and CIRC



# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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This report was made possible thanks to community members, advocates, people recently released, and individuals who remain detained. Their stories have provided us with firsthand accounts, allowing us to better understand the conditions of Aurora GEO.

It is important to note that some information remains unclear, especially concerning the food inside the detention center. It should be noted that different experiences surrounding food stemmed from different parts of the facility. When trying to confirm how many kitchens are in the facility, this information could not be obtained.

We recognize that this information is based on firsthand accounts and note that individuals felt more comfortable sharing their stories once released rather than when they were in detention.

That being said, we do understand there may be bias in these reports as each individual has recounted their experiences during a time of heightened emotion.

In order to ensure we are sharing the most accurate data, stories have been confirmed with multiple sources before being included in this report.

Report written with the assistance of Gabrielle L. as a representative of Casa de Paz

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