

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 25, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Todd Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs
Enforcement
500 12th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Secretary Mullin and Acting Director Lyons:

We write with serious alarm regarding recent reports of abuse faced by detainees in U.S. Immigration and Enforcement (ICE) custody at the Everglades Detention Facility, dubbed “Alligator Alcatraz.”¹ There have been credible allegations that detainees at “Alligator Alcatraz” have been punished with confinement in a small cage-like structure known as “the box,” where they are held in stress positions with hands and feet tightly shackled for hours at a time, in direct sunlight with no access to food or water.² These conditions reportedly suffered by detainees, as alleged, appear to violate Department of Homeland Security (DHS) detention standards and the United Nations Convention Against Torture. We therefore urgently seek information from DHS and ICE about the purported use of “the box.” If “the box” is in use, we urge DHS and ICE to immediately cease its use and prevent detainees from being subjected to torture.

Numerous reports of poor conditions and abuse at “Alligator Alcatraz” have surfaced since its opening in July 2025, including lack of food and access to reliable medical care,³ challenges accessing legal counsel,⁴ and other human rights concerns. However, recent reports of “the box” stand out as particularly egregious. One report describes “the box” as cramped, “with enough space to stand—but not enough to [lay down]—forcing exhausted prisoners to sit and lean against the metal bars.”⁵ Detainees placed in “the box”—located outside and in direct sunlight—are reportedly forced to endure high temperatures, high humidity, and “horsefly-size mosquitos.”⁶ In July, when the first allegations emerged of detainees being placed in “the box,”

¹ “Alligator Alcatraz” is located at the former site of the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport near Ochopee and is therefore sometimes also referred to as the “Dade-Collier Facility.”

² Tim Padgett, *‘They chained me to the ground’: Detainees at Alligator Alcatraz allege harsh punishment by guards*, WLRN (Jul. 22, 2025), <https://www.wlrn.org/immigration/2025-07-22/alligator-alcatraz-detainee-punishments>.

³ Nicole Acevedo, *Detainees held at Alligator Alcatraz describe cage-like units swarmed by mosquitoes*, NBC News (Jul. 22, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/alligator-alcatraz-florida-detainees-conditions-fungus-mosquitoes-rcna220205>.

⁴ *Groups Sue Trump Administration Over Lack of Access to Counsel for People Held at Florida’s Notorious Everglades Immigration Detention Center*, Americans for Immigrant Justice (Jul. 16, 2025), <https://aijjustice.org/2025/08/12/groups-sue-trump-administration-over-lack-of-access-to-counsel-for-people-held-at-floridas-notorious-everglades-immigration-detention-center/>.

⁵ Jose Pagliery, *Two Former ‘Alligator Alcatraz’ Inmates Allege Migrant Detainees Were Confined in a Tiny ‘Box’ at Times*, NOTUS (Dec. 16, 2025), <https://www.notus.org/immigration/alligator-alcatraz-cage-detention>.

⁶ Tim Padgett, *‘They chained me to the ground’: Detainees at Alligator Alcatraz allege harsh punishment by guards*, WLRN (Jul. 22, 2025), <https://www.wlrn.org/immigration/2025-07-22/alligator-alcatraz-detainee-punishments>.

temperatures in the Everglades regularly exceed 90 degrees. One Nicaraguan man reported that his “hands and feet were painfully shackled” when he was placed in “the box” in the recreation yard, prohibiting any movement. He reportedly remained in “the box” directly exposed to the sun and heat for hours, with no water.⁷

The reported conditions of “the box,” including its placement in direct sunlight, its small dimensions and cage-like structure, and the lack of access to food and water exceed disciplinary segregation practices allowable under the ICE detention standards and ICE Directive 11065.1, which provides guidelines on ICE’s use of solitary confinement.⁸ ICE Directive 11065.1 establishes that restrictive housing is a measure of last resort and requires that any such placement be narrowly tailored, documented, medically reviewed, and regularly reassessed.⁹ The directive further requires that individuals in restrictive settings retain access to medical care and basic necessities.¹⁰ As described, the conditions individuals are allegedly subjected to in “the box”—including prolonged outdoor placement, use of restraints, and denial of food and water—would not comply with these requirements. Indeed, reported use of “the box” as punishment rises to the level of torture prohibited under U.S.¹¹ and international law.¹² We therefore urge DHS to immediately cease use of “the box” at “Alligator Alcatraz” and across the U.S. immigration detention system.

Given these concerns, we further ask that you provide responses to the following questions and requests regarding use of “the box” (or any similar practice, device or mechanism used to separate detainees in solitary confinement for the purposes of punishment or discipline) no later than April 8, 2026.

1. ICE has indicated that the ICE detention standards apply at the "Alligator Alcatraz" facility,¹³ and ICE detainees are locatable using the ICE Online Detainee Locator System, used exclusively for detainees in ICE custody.¹⁴ Are the noncitizens detained at the “Alligator Alcatraz” facility in the care and custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement? If not, which state or federal government agency or office is responsible for the care and custody of detainees at “Alligator Alcatraz”?
 - a. Further, please clarify which immigration detention standards (*i.e.*, Performance Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) 2011(2016), National Detention Standards (NDS) 2025, etc.) apply at “Alligator Alcatraz.”

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ U.S. Immigr. & Customs Enf’t, Directive 11065.1: Review of the Use of Segregation for ICE Detainees (Sept. 4, 2013), <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/foia/policy/directive11065.1.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ 18 U.S.C. §§ 2340–2340A; U.S. CONST. amend. VIII.

¹² Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment art. 2, Dec. 10, 1984, 1465 U.N.T.S. 85.

¹³ ICE has indicated that the ICE detention standards apply at the facility. South Florida Detention Facility Visitation & Mail Policy, Ex. 1 to Second Supplemental Declaration of Mark Saunders in Support of State Defendants' Sur-Reply in Opposition to Plaintiffs' Motion for Preliminary Injunction at 7-18, *H.C.R., v. Noem, Case No. 2:25-cv-00747-SPC-DNF, ECF (M.D. Fla. Oc. 9, 2025)*, *ECF No. 152-1*.

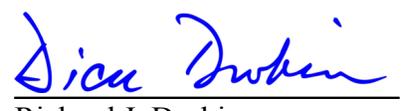
¹⁴ Attorneys have noted that they are able to locate their clients at the "Alligator Alcatraz" facility using ICE's Online Detainee Locator System, a system used exclusively for detainees held in ICE custody. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, "Online Detainee Locator System," <https://locator.ice.gov/odls/>.

- b. Please provide a copy of the agreement between ICE and the state of Florida regarding the detention of ICE detainees at "Alligator Alcatraz."
 2. Please explain the purpose(s) of "the box" or any similar device or mechanism used to place detained individuals in solitary confinement for the purposes of punishment or discipline.
 - a. Please provide a copy of all written policies, directives, or guidelines for use of "the box" at "Alligator Alcatraz," including monitoring and assessments of individuals by medical and mental health professionals prior to, and during, their placement in "the box." If no such policies, directives, or guidelines exist, why not?
 - b. How many times has "the box" been used at "Alligator Alcatraz" since the facility opened in July 2025, and what was the duration of each placement?
 - c. Who has the authority to order placement of a detainee in "the box," and what level of supervisory approval is required?
 3. Provide a copy of any policy or guidance regarding the use of shackles on detainees placed in "the box"—and during their detention at "Alligator Alcatraz" generally—and all training materials used to train staff in the use of shackles.
 4. Please indicate the oversight offices to which a detainee can address a complaint about detention conditions (*i.e.*, the DHS Inspector General (OIG), the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL)) and steps individuals may take to file complaints (*i.e.*, electronically, using a tablet or kiosk, and/or in writing).
 - a. To what other authorities can detainees raise such complaints for consideration and action, should these entities be unable to respond due to capacity, funding, or other issues?
 - b. Please provide steps taken to provide notice, orally or in writing, of detainees' right to file such complaints, and in what languages the notice is provided.
 5. Please provide copies of any significant incident reports (SIRs) created in relation to the use of "the box" at "Alligator Alcatraz" (with personally identifiable information redacted).
 6. Please provide records indicating if "the box" is used at other immigration detention facilities in which ICE detains non-citizens.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator