



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 26, 2025

The Hon. Kristi Noem
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security

The Hon. Todd Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Secretary Noem and Acting Director Lyons:

I am writing to express serious concerns regarding a lack of transparency and communication with my office regarding attempts to conduct Congressional oversight at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility known as Camp East Montana on Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas.

Most recently, on September 22, 2025, my office was abruptly informed that their planned visit to Camp East Montana scheduled for September 23, 2025 had been cancelled. ICE had approved my staff for a visit to the facility in two separate email confirmations on September 16th and September 18th; the visit was originally requested on September 10th. However, less than 24 hours before my staff's planned visit, ICE rescinded their confirmation without explanation. After failing to respond to emails asking for details on the cancellation, ICE eventually told my staff over the phone that their visit had been cancelled due to "operational tempos" at Camp East Montana. This is an unacceptable response from an agency that is currently in violation of Section 527 of Public Law 118-47 and illegally barring Members of Congress and their staff from their oversight duties ¹.

The cancellation of my staff's scheduled visit is the latest in a string of dishonest and opaque communication from ICE with my office since the opening of Camp East Montana. ICE originally denied a request from my office to tour Camp East Montana at the beginning of August, explaining the site was not safe due to ongoing construction. Despite these apparent safety concerns, ICE was already holding people at the site. My office was ultimately granted an opportunity to conduct oversight at Camp East Montana on August 18th and August 28th.

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/118/plaws/publ47/PLAW-118publ47.pdf#page=161>

During both of our visits, my staff and I observed serious issues regarding insufficient staffing, lack of access to the facility for legal counsel, and unresponsive phones. Detainees we spoke to told us about being served rotten food and shared urgent concerns over the quality of the drinking water at the facility, which they reported had a bad smell and made them feel sick.

We observed many of the same disturbing issues detailed in the *Washington Post*'s troubling article about dangerous conditions at Camp East Montana. The article states that the first detainees transported to Camp East Montana arrived at the beginning of August, when the facility was still an active construction site full of machinery and unfinished structures and lacked coordinated safety plans for staff and detainees ².

According to the article, detainees have been subjected to at least 60 violations of standards for immigrant detention, including facility staff failing to properly monitor and treat detainees' medical conditions, not providing detainees with ways to contact their lawyers or receive updates on the status of their cases for prolonged periods, and insufficient telephones and tablets for detainees to make necessary calls ³. Reporting further indicates that, because Camp East Montana remains actively under construction, some detainees have even been held at the facility without access to basic necessities like functioning toilets, sinks, and insufficient recreational space ⁴.

Following our oversight visits to Camp East Montana, my staff followed up with our ICE liaisons with a list of questions on September 3rd to address remaining concerns that were not answered while we were on-site. As of the date of this letter, my team has yet to receive a formal response from ICE. Similarly, my office provided detainees at Camp East Montana with Privacy Release Forms (PRFs) so that our office can follow up on individuals' cases. Additionally, my team has 21 pending inquiries with staff at Camp East Montana, including multiple follow-up inquiries, that have also gone unanswered. This is highly unusual given my office's working relationship with local ICE officials and is totally unacceptable.

I have included the list of questions from my district office below and urge ICE and the Department of Homeland Security to provide my office with detailed responses by October 3, 2025.

1. When our office first visited, we were informed that Camp East Montana had "about" 300 support staff consisting of contractors and about 40 ICE staff on site, and that whenever the facility reaches a 3,000-bed capacity, the number of ICE staff "should" be 10 ICE supervisors and 40 Deportation officers.
 - a. What will the contractor staffing numbers be at 3,000 and 5,000 beds?
2. During our August 28th visit, our office discussed the list of the vendors at Camp East Montana with staff, including the food vendor that was local to El Paso and was in the process of phasing out, and the new food vendor that would replace them. Please provide the names of those vendors.

² [ICE's new Fort Bliss detention center violated 60 federal standards - The Washington Post](#)

³ [ICE's new Fort Bliss detention center violated 60 federal standards - The Washington Post](#)

⁴ [ICE's new Fort Bliss detention center violated 60 federal standards - The Washington Post](#)

3. We were informed that ICE had re-hired retired staff and annuitants to bring them on in a supervisory role. With these new hires, how many supervisory staff are now on site?
4. What processes are in place to ensure that phones are being answered 24 hours a day, as is necessary, at Camp East Montana? Our office has heard from staff at a local legal service provider organization that it can be difficult to connect with staff at Camp East Montana over the phone. One legal service provider reportedly placed 25 calls to Camp East Montana before staff at the facility answered the phone.
5. What is the current status of construction on the walkway between the visitor area and the meeting space? Are there plans to ensure this walkway is enclosed and protected from the elements in the future?
6. My staff recommended that staff at Camp East Montana connect with the City of El Paso Public Health Department as a preventative public health measure against potential outbreaks of illnesses at Camp East Montana. My staff also provided contact information for the city's public health director. Please confirm if staff at Camp East Montana has made efforts to connect with the City of El Paso Public Health Department.
7. Multiple detainees spoke to me and my staff about the quality of the drinking water at Camp East Montana. Several people told us the water smelled bad and made them ill after drinking it. Please confirm where the water is being sourced and what tests are being conducted to ensure it meets all applicable standards for drinking water.
8. Our office shared several Privacy Release Forms (PRFs) with staff at Camp East Montana. What is a reasonable timeframe when we should expect responses on those inquiries?

Sincerely,



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress