

## ICE Blocks Immigrants From Lawyers With Draconian Phone Rules in California, ACLU Says

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An immigration detention center in California has effectively worked to keep immigrants from contacting lawyers through phone rules, a lawsuit alleged last week.

Advocate groups have said calls for those detained in the Adelanto Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Processing Center calls are prohibitively expensive. And if a detainee is able to scrounge together money for call, then they calls are recorded and it is required that someone answer the phone nearly immediately—voicemails are not an option.

"Legal representation is fundamental to ensuring due process for immigrants facing removal, but when our detained clients can't effectively communicate with us, our abilities to be effective advocates are compromised," said Meeth Soni, co-legal director at the Immigrant Defenders Law Center, in a [statement](#) released by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Southern California.

The [lawsuit detailed](#) allegations of how difficult it can be for a detained immigrant to reach a lawyer. The suit alleges that an asylum-seeker named Desmond Tenghe has not been allowed to access funds he brought with and previous earnings from a different detention center were not transferred to Adelanto. Making just \$1 per day working at Adelanto and denied free calls, the suit alleges, Tenghe has to spend a week's earnings to make a call and has to hope he reaches a person immediately. It took him two months to get ahold of his sponsor in Maryland, the suit alleges.

Reads the lawsuit:

*"Over the course of weeks, Plaintiff Tenghe tried to call at least seven different legal organizations, including Catholic Charities, El Rescate, and others. Due to Defendants' "positive acceptance" requirement for telephone calls, the telephone calls have either disconnected after ringing once or twice or continued to ring without answer. Plaintiff Tenghe has also attempted to call Catholic Charities to obtain documents about current country conditions in his country of origin, but those telephone calls also have not connected because of Defendants' "positive acceptance" requirement."*

The GEO Group, a large contractor for ICE that runs the Adelanto facility, [told the Miami New Times](#) they are simply following procedures.

"As a services provider to ICE, GEO plays no role in establishing immigration law and we comply with the performance-based standards set by the government," a

spokesperson told the outlet. "We would refer specific questions about these policies [be addressed] to ICE."

The lawsuit from the ACLU of Southern California and the Immigrants' Rights Clinic at Stanford Law School further alleges that phone call recording policies at detention centers hinders conversations about legal strategies and that there are just 10 private meeting spaces at Adelanto for nearly 2,000 detainees.

"The U.S. government has placed arbitrary barriers between immigrant detainees and their lawyers which must be eliminated if justice is to be served," said Ben Johnson, executive director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association, in the ACLU press release.



Cell room doors are seen at the Caroline Detention Facility in Bowling Green, Virginia, on August 13, 2018. A former regional jail, the facility has been contracted by the US Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to house undocumented adult immigrant detainees for violations of immigration laws. A different immigration detention facility has been accused of blocking immigrants from lawyers via phone rules. Saul Loeb / AFP/ Getty Images