

ICE Detainee Diagnosed With Schizophrenia Spent 21 Days in Solitary Confinement, Then Took His Own Life

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Isaí Romero had no idea how to break the news to his parents that their son — his brother — had died. The elderly couple, nearly 2,000 miles away in Puebla, Mexico, had been anxiously waiting for their 40-year-old son, Efraín Romero de la Rosa, to be deported back home. Efraín himself was also looking forward to it.

“His big hope was that — going to Mexico,” Isaí Romero, who lives in North Carolina, told The Intercept by phone. The deportation would be a relief compared to the limbo of immigration detention, where Efraín had landed after being placed in immigration removal proceedings by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. But Efraín never made it out of the ICE facility.

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“When they gave me the news, all of a sudden, the entire world collapsed,” Isaí Romero said. “I spent the entire day crying. I didn’t know how to tell my parents what had happened. I waited for my mom to eat — to be calm, you know?”

Efraín Romero’s suicide came at the end of 21 days in solitary confinement, according to investigators.

Romero had been previously diagnosed with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, according to documents from the Virginia Department of Corrections. His death parallels a case from May 2017, when 27-year-old Jean Jimenez-Joseph, another Stewart detainee with a mental health diagnosis, killed himself at the facility after 19 days in solitary confinement. The United Nations has previously said that such confinements could constitute torture and ICE itself has issued strict directives about isolating detainees, including specifically on segregating people with mental health conditions for extended periods.