CCIJ | CALIFORNIA COLLABORATIVE FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE

# COMMUNITY RESOURCE GUIDE

## First Steps After Someone You Care About is Detained By Immigration Enforcement

This resource guide was created by the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ), a non-profit organization based in California that fights for the collective liberation of immigrants in detention through coordination, advocacy, and legal services.

*While this guide focuses on information for people who were arrested by immigration in California, a lot of the information and links are relevant to people detained anywhere in the U.S.*

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## My loved one is detained, what should I do now?

The hours and days after someone you care about is detained by immigration can be very difficult, scary, and confusing. These moments are also very important, and there are things you can do right away to support your detained loved one. This guide will help you take immediate steps to locate your loved one, communicate with them, and support them in finding a lawyer and gathering important documents.

### Get your community member's "A number"

- What is an "A#"?
    - An "A#" is a unique number the government assigns to non-citizens. It is usually written with a letter "A" at the beginning, followed by 8 or 9 digits.
        - If your loved one's "A number" was created a long time ago and has only 8 digits, you should add a "0" at the beginning to have the complete 9-digit number (e.g. the number A12345678 would actually be A012345687).
- Your loved one's "A#" (Alien Number) helps you locate them and track immigration hearings.
- If you don't know their "A number," ask them or an officer/guard for it as soon as you hear from them.
- Your loved one's "A#" should appear on any papers received from ICE or an immigration court, as well as on their detention facility ID card and/or bracelet.
- If your loved one was previously arrested near the border and released, had a CBPOne appointment, and/or has had other prior immigration contact (immigration court case, immigration arrest, work permit, or visa application), it's likely they will already have an "A#" in their immigration documents.
- If this is your loved one's first contact with immigration officials, ICE will assign them an "A#" on the day they are arrested.

### How to locate your loved one

- Use this link to locate your friend/family member if they have been detained by ICE: https://locator.ice.gov/odls/#/search.
- Search by either A# & country of birth, or person's biographical information.
- You may need to try different variations or spellings of their name, such as adding a hyphen between two last names.
- Minors under 18 years of age will not appear in the ICE Detainee Locator system. If you are trying to locate a minor in immigration custody check this website.
- Once you have found your loved one, click on name of facility hyperlink for more info on facility and controlling ICE office.
- Click "More Information" to link to ICE's page for each facility, including visitation info.

### Detention Centers Where California Residents are Frequently Sent

- Here are direct links to the facility pages for detention centers in California and where California residents are frequently sent:
  - Adelanto (Adelanto, CA)
  - California City Detention Facility (California City, CA)
  - Desert View Annex (Adelanto, CA)
  - Golden State Annex (McFarland, CA)
  - Imperial Regional Detention Facility (Calexico, CA)
  - Mesa Verde (Bakersfield, CA)
  - Otay Mesa (San Diego, CA)
  - Northwest Detention Center (Tacoma, WA)

ICE has information (including location and contact information) for the detention centers it uses on its website: https://www.ice.gov/detention-facilities

- You can filter by state or search by facility name to look for a specific detention center.

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## I located my loved one. How do I...

## Contact my loved one in detention?

- GettingOut is the platform used by many ICE facilities for community members to contact their loved ones in detention. **You will need to:**
    - Create an account on GettingOut
    - Add your loved one on GettingOut in order to send them messages.
- GettingOut has a video tutorial on how to send a message on their platform
    - English guide here
    - Una guía en español aquí.
- Notes about GettingOut
    - Your loved one's "Booking ID" is their "A number."
    - The system can be finicky. When you search a person by their name on GettingOut, you may need to enter their first name where it asks for last name.
    - The naming conventions for facilities vary. For example, if your loved one is detained at Golden State Annex, the facility is listed as "GEO Golden State Annex" on GettingOut.
    - This is what the GettingOut App looks like. It is available for Android and Apple users.

## Send money for their commissary account?

- People in detention are not allowed to have cash in their possession. A commissary account is a special funds account that allows people detained to use money to purchase items or minutes for phone calls. It is important you have your loved one's "A number" and the correct facility in order to successfully transfer funds.
- **There are 4 different ways to deposit funds into a commissary account:**
    - **1. Electronically via GettingOut:**
    - **2. Money Order by mail**
        - **Cash is NOT accepted. You must send a money order or cashier's check and have your loved one's "A number" on the memo.** It is encouraged to mail this money order via certified mail so you can get confirmation of when the facility has received the envelope.

- A money order can be purchased at a U.S. Post Office (or a store; however, it's easier to return a money order to a post office). Please note that there is a small processing fee to purchase a money order.
- If the person is released after the mail was opened by the mailroom, the facility will send a check. If the person was released before it gets opened, the money order will be returned (and you can take it back to the post office to get the funds back).

▪ **Please note that you will need to put a valid return address on the upper lefthand corner of the envelope for the money order to be accepted.**

▪ DO NOT include any letters or other documents with the money order. These items will NOT be forwarded to your loved one.

▪ **You will have to address the envelope accordingly:**

- **For all detention centers in California except Adelanto:**

[NAME OF DETENTION CENTER]

[First Name] [Last Name(s)], ["A Number"]

[Address of the detention center]

- **For Adelanto:**

[NAME OF DETENTION CENTER]

[First Name] [Last Name(s)], ["A Number"],

[Housing unit, dorm, bunk #)

[Address of the detention center]

▪ **According to trusted advocates, money orders sent to California City are forwarded to Georgia to be processed. For this reason, we do not recommend sending money orders to people detained at California City.**

- **3. In-person -** call in advance to confirm because it varies by facility.
  - IF the facility offers in-person deposits, go during their visitation hours and inquire at the intake desk on how to deposit funds. If they have an onsite ATM, they will direct you to it and the guard attending the desk will be able to walk you through how to deposit the money into your loved one's account. It is important you have your loved one's "A number."
  - When you call the detention facility, be sure to ask whether the machines are in operation. **Some community members have reported the existence of**

**machines that haven't been in service for years and it may be more efficient to deposit funds a different way.**

- **4. Direct Deposit -** use this option if the money needs to be deposited as quickly as possible, for example if your loved one is scheduled to be deported and there's not enough time for the other options.
  - Every detention center uses a different platform to process direct deposits. You can call the facility in advance to confirm which platform to use. You will need to create an account with the corresponding platform to complete the transaction. **Please note there is a processing fee for direct deposits, and the fee goes up the higher the sum of money.**
    - Golden State Annex uses CorrectPay. You can search for a person through their A#.
    - Mesa Verde uses JPay. You can search for a person through their A#.
    - California City uses ConnectNetwork GTL (same company as GettingOut) You must have a person's Commissary #, which is different to their A#.
  - **Please note that accounts are often closed up to two days before a person is released or deported. You cannot deposit money for them once an account is closed.**

## Visit my loved one in detention in-person?

- Select the facility your loved one is detained at here, and go to the visitation tab for instructions. **Unfortunately, some detention centers don't update information on the website regularly, so we recommend calling the facility before planning your visit.**
- For most facilities, you will need to ask your loved one their housing unit to determine what day and time you can visit them. If you do not know their housing unit, you can try calling the facility to ask.
- **People who are undocumented are NOT advised to go to detention centers to visit loved ones.** Consult with an attorney if you have questions about whether it is safe for you to visit a detention center.
- **All visitors should bring a form of valid ID.** Children *may* be permitted without an ID, but if they have a school ID or U.S. birth certificate it is a good idea to bring that.
- Visitors are subject to security screening. Visitors typically must leave phones, smart watches, and other technology in the parking lot or lockers (not available at all

facilities). Visitors typically cannot bring other items in with them, but it varies by facility so you can call in advance. For instance, at some detention centers, visitors may bring a bag of quarters or credit card to purchase snacks from the vending machines for their loved ones.

- Capacity varies per facility in terms of space available for visitations, so anticipate a wait. It is encouraged to arrive at least 15 minutes before a visitation window to ensure you can see your loved one.
- Please review dress code rules carefully before visiting the facility as people have been turned away if they had, for example, yoga pants or ripped jeans. Most facilities have dress code rules listed under the visitation tab. If in doubt, here is a sample of compiled dress code rules here. Note that underwire bras or other apparel with metal on it may set off metal detectors and require further screening, such as with a metal-detecting wand.
- **Review the visitation tab for the detention facility carefully for other restrictions.** Please note that the majority of facilities have a limit to the number of people allowed into a visitation session. Most facilities also limit how many visitation sessions a person detained may have within a day and week.
- **Minor children are allowed to visit the facility.** Minor children under 18 must be accompanied by an adult guardian (18 years or older). Minors must not be left unaccompanied in the waiting room, visiting room, or any other area. Children may also count towards the limit of persons in a visitation session, so please review the visitation page for the facility and call in advance to confirm visitation rules and limits, including for children.

## Send items to my loved one in detention?

- The first step to send an item, such as a book, is for your loved one to submit a “kite” request that details specifically what item(s) they are requesting to receive. See below for more information on what a “kite request” is.
- **Do not send items to your loved one without the request being approved first.**
- If the request is approved, the facility typically has pre-approved or preferred vendors to purchase the item from (like bookshop.org or Amazon).
    - Be sure to use a preferred vendor and have the vendor ship the item **directly to your detained loved one at the facility.**

- The items must be the exact same as the kite request that was approved. For example, if you're trying to send a book, the author's name, title of book, and even publisher (depending on the facility) must be an exact match to the approved "kite."

- **What is a "kite" request?:**
  - A "kite" request is a written form submitted by someone in detention in order to communicate with facility staff, ICE officers, or other departments.
  - A "kite" can be used to request services such as medical care, dental appointments, or library access; address concerns and resolve informal issues; schedule appointments with caseworkers or other staff; submit grievances or file complaints; or contact their ICE officer about their immigration case.

## Mail a letter?

- **DO NOT MAIL ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS TO YOUR LOVED ONES**. Always mail a copy. All correspondence, except confidential legal mail sent by an attorney, is subject to a security screening. Some facilities may not just review the mail, but also make a copy of it to provide to the detained person, and shred the original.
- All mail sent to people in ICE custody are subject to content restrictions. If your correspondence is in violation of those restrictions, it will be destroyed.
- **Do not mail passports to someone in ICE custody.**

A note about Golden State Annex and California City- Do not send mail to the physical addresses; instead use:

For Golden State Annex: PO Box 1577, McFarland, CA 93250

For California City: P.O. Box 2513, California City, CA 93505

## Get a document notarized with my loved one's signature?

- Some people might need a document signed by their loved one with a notarized signature for specific needs unrelated to their immigration case. For example, if you need a signed and notarized Power of Attorney form, then you must follow the steps outlined by the facility your loved one is detained at.
- Please note that your loved one will need to make the request for notarization through their tablet. This then goes up to ICE for approval. If the request is granted, a service fee will be withdrawn from their account.

### Prepare a small suitcase for them to take in case they must leave the US?

- Note that detained people being removed from the United States are allowed one small piece of luggage. Such luggage can be sent/delivered after receiving approval from a Supervisory Deportation Officer.
- The first step is for the detained person  to submit a KITE request on their tablet.
    - If they want you to include an electronic item like a prepaid phone, they should include in their request a description of the special circumstances that make it necessary for them to have the item in their luggage.
    - Please note that requests for a specific item can be denied. Do not send any items that are not pre-approved.
- After the “kite” request has been approved, call the detention facility to confirm the best address to send the luggage if you are unable to drop off the luggage yourself. All packages are inspected, so do not include any items that were not previously approved.
- As of April 14, 2026, deportation luggage for people detained at:
    - Golden State Annex or Central Valley Annex should be dropped off at the ICE office at 733 L Street Fresno, CA 93721. Call (559) 266-2083 to confirm.
    - Mesa Verde or CA City should be dropped off at the ICE office at 800 Truxtun Ave, Bakersfield, CA 93301. Call (661) 281-6500 to confirm.

## How can I help my loved one find a lawyer and get ready to fight their legal case if possible?

It is always best to consult individually with an immigration lawyer as soon as possible after someone is detained. Not everyone will have viable legal options, depending on their unique situation and history. But, to have the best chance to fight their case, you can help them gather important documents and find a trusted immigration attorney to consult with as soon as possible.

### 1. Help them gather important documents

- Remember: If your loved one ultimately needs to receive any records from you directly, **only mail COPIES of the documents and keep the original documents somewhere safe.**
- **Prioritize gathering the following documents:**
    - **Any documents relating to past immigration cases,** including notices from an immigration court or the Board of Immigration Appeals, or forms and/or notices regarding any applications filed with USCIS (such as for a U visa, a family visa petition, DACA, etc.)
        - If your loved one may have immigration records (e.g. they were in court or filed a petition or application in the past), help them file a Freedom of Information Action Request ("FOIA") with USCIS.
            - You can find a guide to requesting FOIA records from USCIS here.
    - **Any documents related to contact with law enforcement**
        - If your loved one has ever been arrested by the police, start requesting copies of their criminal history documents as soon as you can.
            - Examples of criminal history documents: police reports, charging documents, dispositions, sentencing documents, and/or "RAP sheets."
        - If your loved one or one of their immediate family members (minor children or spouse) was the victim of a crime, get a copy of the police report.
- Other documents that may be helpful to gather:
    - Copies of any identification documents your loved one may have, as well as their birth certificate.
    - Copies of evidence of lawful status of immediate family members (spouse, parents, children), such as copies of birth certificates, certificates of naturalization, Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) cards, U.S. passports.
- **Prioritize gathering immigration & criminal history documents:** We suggest you prioritize gathering immigration and criminal history documents because they are important to assess your loved one's case and can be time consuming to gather. The more important documents you have ready, the easier it will be for an attorney to give a thorough legal consultation and advise your loved one.
- **A note regarding other documents, including letters of support:**
    - It is advisable to wait to speak to an attorney before you gather other documents not listed above, like letters of support. Not every case will benefit from letters of

support, but more importantly, if your loved one's case does need letters of support, an attorney can help advise on what the letters should include so they are most helpful.

- If your loved one has **medical conditions**, help them advocate to get the care they need by obtaining their medical records
  - Suggestions on how to advocate: log in together on a patient portal, ask a care provider to write a letter giving a summary of the medications needed, or file a medical records request.
  - Guides on how to access medical care in ICE detention:
    - English: https://firrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Medical-Tool-Kit-20131.pdf
    - Spanish: https://firrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Medical-Tool-Kit-2013-SPA-JF1L.pdf

## 2. Encourage the detained community member to sign up for legal clinics and to familiarize themselves with their rights.

- Understanding "pro bono" and "pro se"
  - When talking about legal clinics, you might hear the terms "pro bono" and "pro se."
  - "Pro bono" means free of charge. "Pro se" means someone is representing themselves in court—literally, "on their own behalf."
- Although people in immigration court have the right to an attorney, unlike in criminal proceedings, most people do not have the right to a free attorney paid for by the government. Many people are unable to find free (pro bono) help. As a result, they often have to represent themselves (pro se) and submit applications and evidence and appear in court on their own.
- At some detention centers, legal service providers offer limited legal services such as legal clinics or other help to unrepresented people, such as help with certain

filings or preparing for a court hearing. These organizations may also be able to help you look for a free (pro bono) attorney.

**How to sign up for legal assistance at the following detention facilities (note that unfortunately, not all detention centers have legal clinics available):**

### Adelanto (AIPC) & Desert View Annex (DVA)

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization offering services | Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project |
| Services | • Legal referrals: possible pro bono representation for Rodriguez bond hearing<br>• Non-legal Referrals for support to obtain funds for bond payment |
| Format | • Services offered over the phone. The phone number to call is: 1 (844) 251-8003<br>• Frequency: Tuesday and Friday 9-4 PM<br>• Please be aware that a fee will be charged for calls. Your loved one will need to have sufficient funds on their account to cover the cost of the call. |
| Languages Served | English & Spanish |

### Golden State Annex (GSA)

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization offering services | California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ) |
| Services | **Monthly in-person clinics:** Brief consultations, referrals, and written self-representation guides are offered. CCIJ generally cannot provide forms completion or briefing assistance. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Format | • In-person clinics on the first Friday of each month (or occasionally on the second Friday due to holidays).<br>• **Sign-ups required on dorm sheets posted two weekends before a visit.** CCIJ cannot see people who did not sign up for the clinic and cannot see everyone who signs up each month. |
| Languages Served | English & Spanish. Other languages available upon request through an interpreter. |

### Mesa Verde (MV)

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization offering services | California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ) |
| Services | **Monthly in-person clinics:** Brief consultations, referrals, and written self-representation guides are offered. CCIJ generally cannot provide forms completion or briefing assistance. |
| Format | • In-person clinics generally held on Thursdays, the day before the first Friday of each month.<br>• **Sign-ups required on dorm sheets posted 2 weeks prior to a visit.** CCIJ cannot see people who did not sign up for the clinic and cannot see everyone who signs up each month. |
| Languages Served | English & Spanish. Other languages available upon request through an interpreter. |

### Imperial Regional Detention Facility (Imperial)

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization offering services | Al Otro Lado (AOL) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Services | ● Group Orientations and Individual Orientations on Mondays and Tuesdays. Pro se Workshops happen on Thursdays over Zoom. |
| Format | Sign ups are required. Please refer to the contact sheet provided by AOL here. There are two ways to sign up:<br>● Via Talton Tablet - preferred method: Your loved one will need to send a message to AOL through their tablet expressing what service they would like or what topics — e.g. fear interview, bond, parole — they have questions about.<br>○ Note: They can change the tablet settings to their preferred language, and the system will do the translating via the requests. They should indicate what their preferred language is to better schedule services.<br>● Via Phone<br>○ AOL has a free hotline at Imperial accessible for Spanish and English speakers. Your loved one only has to dial 1120#.<br>○ Your loved one should leave their name, A number, and a brief message expressing what service they would like or what topics — e.g. fear interview, bond, parole — they have questions about. |
| Languages Served | ● Talton Tablet: Services can be requested in the language of your choice.<br>● Phone Services: Available in English and Spanish. |

**Northwest Detention Center (NWIPC)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization offering services | The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP) |
| Services | • In-person consultations every afternoon, Monday through Thursday. There are group information sessions held in Spanish on Thursdays as well.<br>• There is a waitlist for individual legal orientation assistance. It is encouraged your loved one take advantage of the group orientation sessions. If your loved one has an urgent deadline or medical need, for example a one-year filing deadline for an asylum application or a prior deportation order, please be sure they mention this in their initial request for assistance. |
| Format | • Sign-ups are required. There are multiple ways to sign up for legal assistance at this facility, so please refer to the contact sheet provided by NWIRP here. This sheet is also available throughout the facility for detained community members to access.<br>• Please be sure to include in the assistance request (1) the detained person's full name, (2) their A number, and (3) a message explaining what type of assistance they need.<br>• If you are contacting NWIRP on behalf of your loved one, please be sure to make it clear you are doing so with their consent and include the information asked. |
| Languages Served | English & Spanish |

**Otay Mesa (Otay)**

| | |
|---|---|
| Organization offering services | The American Bar Association Immigrant Justice Program (ABAIJP) |
| Services | • Group information sessions one to two times a week by appointment. |
| Format | • To be placed on the waitlist, please contact ABAIJP in one of the following ways:<br>  ○ Phone call: (619) 255-8817<br>  ○ Email: contact@abaijp.org<br>• If you are contacting ABAIJP via phone or email, please leave your name, A#, and the type of support you're requesting in the message. |
| Languages Served | English & Spanish |

- Many organizations have excellent guides for understanding one's rights in immigration detention and for learning how to prepare your own case for relief from deportation and/or to be released. Here are some guides we recommend:
  - **Know Your Rights Toolkit for Detained Community Members**, by the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) – Overview of different types of immigration proceedings, ways one may be released, and applications of relief from deportation.
  - **How to Defend Your Own Case,** by the Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project (FIRRP) – Self-representation guides for different applications you might be eligible to file. (Spanish version here)

## 3. Help your loved one look for an attorney and support them in this fight.

**The immigration court system does not provide most people with free lawyer.** Below are some tips for finding trustworthy free or private immigration lawyers. **It can be difficult to find someone with availability, so reach out to several offices at once and keep following up.**

- If someone in immigration court does not have representation, they can ask the immigration judge for time to find one. At the first hearing after someone is detained, the judge will typically grant more time (a "continuance") easily. However, the more

hearings someone has had, the harder it will be to convince the judge to give them another continuance.

- **Be careful of fraud or false promises.**
    - Notarios are not always lawyers in the United States and cannot necessarily practice law or appear in immigration court. In addition, immigration law is complicated and changing very quickly, so look for a lawyer experienced in immigration law and ideally with experience doing detained cases.
    - Be cautious of believing anyone who promises a certain result for your loved one's case. Someone who promises results is probably not being honest with you.
- **Check out the resource directory below for a list of free or low-cost attorneys.**

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## Resource Directory

### Help Us Keep This Guide Up to Date!

- **FREE OR LOW-COST LAWYERS:**
    - **Immigration Court's list of free attorneys and representatives:** https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/probonofulllist/dl
    - **Immigrant Advocates directory:** https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/legaldirectory/
    - Ready to Stay non profit directory
- **PRIVATE (PAID) LAWYERS:**
    - **American Immigration Lawyers Association directory:** https://ailalawyer.com/
    - **State Bar of California Resource Page:** https://www.calbar.ca.gov/public/legal-resources

### Other resources:

- My Community Member Was Arrested by ICE- What Do I Do?
- Know Your Rights Toolkit for Detained Community Members,
- How to Defend Your Own Case
- Guides on how to access medical care in ICE detention:

    - English: https://firrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Medical-Tool-Kit-20131.pdf
    - Spanish: https://firrp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Medical-Tool-Kit-2013-SPA-JF1L.pdf
- Organizations that provide legal clinics in specific detention centers
    - Adelanto & Desert View Annex: Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project
    - Mesa Verde & Golden State Annex: California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ)
    - Imperial: Al Otro Lado (AOL)
    - Northwest: The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP)
    - Otay Mesa: The American Bar Association Immigrant Justice Program
- *CCIJ cannot guarantee that any of the organizations or private lawyers listed will be able to represent you, and CCIJ is not responsible for services rendered.*

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## Acknowledgments & Resources Referenced

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**Resources referenced:**

- National Immigration Justice Center- Know Your Rights: What to Do if You or a Loved one is Detained

## Help Us Keep This Guide Up to Date!

This guide is meant to be a living resource, and the best way to keep it useful is with insight from the community. **If you have suggestions, new information, or notice that any steps have changed, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at info@ccijustice.org.**

Thank you for helping us keep this resource strong!

*This resource was created and last updated by the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice (CCIJ) in May 2026. It is intended for information only and does not constitute legal advice.*