

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 23, 2025

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Mr. Todd M. Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street SW, Mail Stop 5902
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Secretary Noem and Acting Director Lyons:

We are writing following the tragic news that Mr. Nenko Gantchev died on December 15, 2025, while in the custody of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the North Lake Processing Center in Baldwin, Michigan.¹ Mr. Gantchev's death is the most recent in a deeply troubling pattern of deaths in ICE custody. As of December 2025, ICE has reported at least 30 detainee deaths this year, the highest number recorded since 2004.² Particularly alarming, Mr. Gantchev's death was the fourth reported detainee death within a four-day period between December 12 and December 15, 2025.³ The sharp increase in deaths in ICE custody, combined with persistent reports of inadequate medical care and serious deficiencies in detention conditions,⁴ raises grave concerns that warrant immediate congressional oversight and accountability. Therefore, we request an immediate and fully transparent investigation into the death of Mr. Gantchev and ask that you respond to this letter by no later than Friday, January 9th, 2026, with the preliminary findings of this investigation.

Mr. Gantchev, a Bulgarian national, was arrested by ICE on September 23, 2025, and detained pending removal proceedings.⁵ He was then placed in detention at the North Lake Processing

¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Illegal Alien from Bulgaria Passes Away at North Lake Processing Center, Natural Causes Suspected*, (Dec. 18, 2025), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/illegal-alien-bulgaria-passes-away-north-lake-processing-center-natural-causes>

² Marianne LeVine & Douglas MacMillan, *Four ICE Detainee Deaths in Four Days Spark Alarm as Arrests Grow*, Washington Post, (Dec. 20, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/12/20/ice-detainee-deaths/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Claudia Lauer, *Senate Report Details Dozens of Cases of Medical Neglect in Federal Immigration Detention Centers*, PBS NewsHour, (Oct. 31, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/senate-report-details-dozens-of-cases-of-medical-neglect-in-federal-immigration-detention-centers>

⁵ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Illegal Alien from Bulgaria Passes Away at North Lake Processing Center, Natural Causes Suspected*, (Dec. 18, 2025), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/illegal-alien-bulgaria-passes-away-north-lake-processing-center-natural-causes>

Center (North Lake), an 1,800-bed detention facility that's owned and operated by private prison firm GEO Group. Since reopening in June of this year, reports indicate that North Lake's detainee population has swelled in recent months due to escalated immigration enforcement activities under this Administration. This detainee population growth has coincided with complaints regarding inhumane conditions and inadequate medical care at the facility.⁶ According to the detainee death notification released pursuant to statutory requirements on December 18, 2025, Mr. Gantchev was found unresponsive in his cell on December 15, 2025, and was pronounced deceased at approximately 9:54 p.m.⁷ The death of any individual in ICE custody requires a thorough and transparent investigation to ensure compliance with applicable standards of care.

As of the date of this letter, ICE has publicly reported at least 30 detainee deaths since January 23, 2025.⁸ This figure represents the second-highest annual total since the agency's establishment, and a significant increase from the 11 reported detainee deaths in 2024.⁹ Under both congressional mandates and ICE's internal policy directives, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ICE must adhere to established standards of care for those in custody. However, the drastic and disturbing trend that has emerged in 2025 calls into question how the Department and ICE are fulfilling these standards. These questions are further strengthened by a recently published report by Senator Jon Ossoff (D-GA) in October 2025 documenting significant credible reports of medical neglect and denial of adequate food or water across numerous ICE detention facilities nationwide.¹⁰

In light of these facts, the investigation into Mr. Gantchev's death must fully and accurately account for all aspects of his detention. The investigation should address, at a minimum, the following:

1. Did ICE conduct all required medical screening, care, and supervision of any medical needs that Mr. Gantchev presented upon arrival at North Lake or developed during his detention? If Mr. Gantchev developed any needs that required medical care during his

⁶ Rose White, *During a Deadly Year for ICE Detention, Man Dies at Michigan's Newest Facility*, MLive, (Dec. 19, 2025), <https://www.mlive.com/news/2025/12/during-a-deadly-year-for-ice-detention-man-dies-at-michigans-newest-facility.html>

⁷ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Illegal Alien from Bulgaria Passes Away at North Lake Processing Center, Natural Causes Suspected*, (Dec. 18, 2025), <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/illegal-alien-bulgaria-passes-away-north-lake-processing-center-natural-causes>

⁸ Marianne LeVine & Douglas MacMillan, *Four ICE Detainee Deaths in Four Days Spark Alarm as Arrests Grow*, Washington Post, (Dec. 20, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/12/20/ice-detainee-deaths/>

⁹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, *Detainee Death Reporting*, (last accessed December 22, 2025), <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detainee-death-reporting>

¹⁰ U.S. Senator Jon Ossoff, *Medical Neglect & Denial of Adequate Food or Water in U.S. Immigration Detention*, (Oct. 2025), https://www.ossoff.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/25.10.24_Sen.-Ossoff-Medical-Neglect-Denial-of-Adequate-Food-or-Water-in-U.S.-Immigration-Detention.pdf

detention at North Lake, please outline the steps that officials took to provide sufficient medical care for those needs and mitigate the cause of such needs.

2. When was the first sign that Mr. Gantchev was experiencing any medical issue? Or, when was he discovered unresponsive in his cell?
3. Upon discovery of Mr. Gantchev unresponsive in his cell, did ICE and facility staff follow all required procedures for medical intervention as mandated by statute or ICE policy? Please outline all actions taken in detail. If proper procedures were not followed, please explain how the response deviated from required protocols, the justification for any such deviation, and what corrective actions have been or will be implemented to prevent similar failures in the future.
4. During Mr. Gantchev's detention at North Lake, were any complaints logged on the treatment, either for basic needs, accommodations, or medical care, by Mr. Gantchev or by others on his behalf? If so, please describe how those complaints were investigated and what remedial actions were taken.

Additionally, given the ongoing reports regarding the treatment of detainees and conditions of accommodations at North Lake, we also request an investigation into the current conditions at the facility. The review should address, at a minimum, the following:

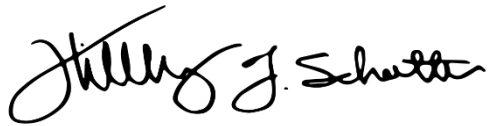
1. How is ICE fulfilling the required medical screening, care, and supervision of any medical needs of detainees at North Lake, especially in light of the rapid population increase at the facility since reopening? Please provide a description of the current and future expected staffing of medical professionals to fulfill such required medical care.
2. Please provide a copy of all policies and procedures for medical screening and response currently in place.
3. Please provide the number of detainees currently being housed at North Lake who have lodged a complaint or request pertaining to medical care.
4. How is ICE meeting requirements related to mandatory basic need care, including safe accommodations, at North Lake, especially in light of the rapid population increase at the facility since reopening? Please provide a description of the current and future expected staffing of required professionals to fulfill such functions.
5. Has ICE investigated any complaints regarding the conditions at North Lake? If so, how many? Please provide a detailed description of the complaints received, the steps taken to investigate them, and any corrective actions implemented as a result.

Please respond no later than Friday, January 9th, 2026, with a preliminary description of the findings of the ongoing investigation. We look forward to reviewing the preliminary and final reports.

We all believe in a secure border, but securing our border does not require abandoning our commitment to the rule of law and protecting and honoring human dignity. Indeed, DHS and

ICE have a statutory mandate, internal policy obligations, and a fundamental duty to ensure the safety and humane treatment of individuals in their custody. The death of Mr. Gantchev, along with the deaths of other detainees in 2025 and numerous credible reports of mistreatment, raises serious concerns about detention practices in Michigan and nationwide. To ensure justice for those who have died in custody already, and safety of those currently detained, these concerns demand prompt answers and corrective action.

Sincerely,



Hillary Scholten
Member of Congress



Haley Stevens
Member of Congress