U.S. Congresswoman Emily Randall (D, WA-06)
Oversight Visit at the Tacoma NW ICE Detention Center
January 5, 2026

[VIDEO]

Rep. Randall: This is my sixth oversight visit of the Northwest Detention Center since being sworn in last January. I had a tour of some new areas that we hadn't seen before, spoke with senior ICE and GEO staff members locally, and had a chance to sit down with four individuals who are being detained.

The areas that we saw this time were the disciplinary and administrative segregation housing units. We did another look at the law library, where, last time they hadn't had but one or two privacy release forms. They had restocked this time in English and Spanish.

We also visited a men's housing unit, which I they've not shown us previously. They've mostly shown us the women's housing units. We went through medical, we were hoping to see…special medical housing for folks who are being isolated because of infectious disease or mental health suicidal ideation. We weren't able to see those rooms, but we walked through the health care facility and then the health care officer described to us what those housing units look like, which is very similar to the administrative and disciplinary segregation unit, a complete bed, housing, toilet, shower.

I'm happy to share a little bit more about what we heard from the individuals we visited with. There is an individual whose first language is Mandarin and has visual impairment and has struggled to access reasonable accommodations, both for his primary language and for his vision needs.

I spoke with another individual who has had GI issues since June and has struggled to get the health care that he needs.

I talked to another woman – a child who's just 18 -- who has had ovarian problems and was sent out for an ultrasound in November and hasn't gotten the results back yet and is being only prescribed ibuprofen. And for women in the world who struggle with PCOS and other similar health challenges, I think folks know that that's not meeting your healthcare needs.

Then another woman who has been here for 17 months, having not committed any crimes in the U.S., and who is in the CAT process, Convention Against Torture, so she won't be remanded to her home country of El Salvador, but is potentially going to be deported to a third party nation.

Everyone we spoke to was concerned not only about what they've experienced, but about what their fellow detainees are experiencing. We received a couple of handwritten stories from individuals we didn't have appointments set to meet with. We're hoping that our office could help them and we left the last woman we talked to with a stack of privacy release forms too, that she could share with the folks in her housing unit.

Reporter: Yeah. I mean, this is your sixth time here. Can you point out anything that was a little bit different, but it's also the new year, and I'm sure morale is not high.

Rep. Randall: Morale is definitely not high. The detainees we talked with were felt really demoralized about the odds that they would be able to see any difference. But we brought in media releases. We told them that, 'look my job is to share your stories and to use your experience to advocate for better.' I think that was a little bright spot for them, knowing that we're at least aligned there.

I was frustrated last time we were here, the ICE and GEO staff asked us to send our questions ahead of time because they couldn't answer them on the spot. So, we sent our questions ahead of time and they couldn't answer them because they didn't have enough time to review them. So, we will continue following up and sending questions.

On the way out, I referenced a California colleague who visits every week to her detention facility, and I said, 'Well, you might see more of us. We'll come with our weekly list of questions maybe.' I don't think they were very happy about that so hopefully that means we get more of our questions answered sooner. Though, we will also keep escalating to the Department of Homeland Security, to Secretary Noem's office, to the ICE liaison in Seattle. We're sort of on all fronts trying to get the answers to the questions that detainees deserve, that our office deserves, that the American people deserve.

Reporter: I saw that you sent a letter to acting Director Todd Lyons, did you guys hear anything back from them at all?

Rep. Randall: We haven't heard yet on that letter. Our previous letter, we had very dissatisfactory answers to some of our questions. I think in that letter, we gave a due date of this next week, the 16th of January. So, we will keep an eye out.

Reporter: Is there anything that concerns you about the facility itself?

Rep. Randall: My biggest concern, especially over the last few visits, has been how folks are able to access medical care in the facility. So they do sort of a sick call on one day, and then you're called back. You sign up for an appointment, you're called back three, four, some days later. Sometimes people aren't called back, and they have to go to sick call again. You know, there are patients who are just getting ibuprofen for whatever it is that ails them, whether it's, you know, tooth problem, or whether it's ovarian pain or any number of things.

I'm also really concerned, as Congresswoman Dexter and I noted last visit that individuals who are being sent out to community care, you know, to hospitals, to providers in the district, GI, etc. -- they are not able to access healthcare privately. ICE or a GEO staffer is in the room with them at every appointment. And the staff told us that on a case-by-case basis they will evaluate whether it's safe to leave the detainee in the room, and it was really amazing to be here with Dr. Dexter, who has treated incarcerated individuals in Oregon, and who knows that it is standard practice when there is a single door in and out, for the doctor to be able to be in the room with their patient, with the DOC, or, you know, other security staff outside of the door aligned with HIPAA.

But that is not the practice or policy of ICE or GEO and we have asked them verbally twice, I think, in writing once, and we will continue to ask for the written protocol and the written procedures that require them to act contrary to the state laws that allow providers to see patients individually.

Reporter: You talk to someone who's been in this facility for 17 months?

Rep. Randall: Yeah, yeah.

Reporter: Does this facility have the capability to easily do that long of a stay with somebody?

Rep. Randall: I think what's notable is the shift from 2024 to 2025, the average stay increased dramatically in length. Folks are not being released, conditionally released as frequently as they were before. If they have pending cases they're not being released to the community, they're being held here.

As far as 'are able to hold people long term?' I think we're seeing the bed count increase, right? Their capacity is 1,500. Today, I asked and they're at 1,354. In November of 2024, I think they were at 900. So, it's a big jump, and they're getting close to the capacity limit here.

I asked if they had a weekly or a daily report on bed capacity numbers, moving in numbers moving out, what kind of health care issues each of the people had and sort of jokingly, was like 'could you just copy us on this daily report so that we could be aware too?' And they were sort of cagey about what the daily updates included, certainly, that they included bed count. But that's information that we're going to continue asking for, because the longer that people stay, the more people that come into the facility, the closer we get to that capacity, the harder it is for them to use the swing unit for health care crises, it's harder for them to see patients for medical care as frequently they still have staff openings that they're hiring for. There are needs that just are unmet when your beds are so full.

Reporter: What is living like that? Is that dorm living?

Rep. Randall: Bunk beds. Most of the housing units I've seen have two levels of bunk beds, and then cafeteria style tables on the main floor. Most of the units have a small [area] that they call recreation space, but it's walled in with just a little bit of sky outside that they can use in their unit but doesn't count as their regular rec access.

There are puzzles and TVs and iPads. I'd say the housing unit is probably like, here to this one, two, three trees deep. *[pointing outside where the presser was held]* That's why it is from here to the to the end of the road, it's probably like the size of some of the housing units I've seen. I don't have a count for how many beds, but it's a lot crammed in the space that I can't imagine living in for a week, much less 17 months.

Reporter: Were they able to give you a head count on how many medical staffers there are?

Rep. Randall: I explicitly didn't ask for how many medical staff that they had. They did tell us that they had openings in medical. They were short two contractual vacancies in the healthcare unit, six medical department vacancies that are government employees, and three vacancies for behavioral health government employees.

Reporter: Just to kind of wrap things up, why do you come here regularly, why do you do that?

Rep. Randall: I think as the member that represents this district, it feels like it's my responsibility to provide federal oversight. Just like I do to the Forest Service, and NOAA, and the other agencies in our district, Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and the Department of Defense. But it's even more important here as a humanitarian issue.

There are folks I've spoken to in this facility who have never committed crimes in the United States, who are here because they were without papers, because they didn't come the right way. Because they happen to be born on the other side of the border. But were coming for opportunity, and yes, I believe that it's our responsibility to have an immigration system, a process, but it should be funded and humane, and it shouldn't look like rounding people up on the street from their homes, from their jobs, and housing them in a facility like this for months and months and months on end without adequate health care.

The American people don't want that. Our neighbors don't want that. I ran into some people in the lobby who come regularly. I get stopped on the ferry all the time by people who say, like, 'keep showing up, keep fighting for humane treatment of our neighbors, our fellow Washingtonians.'

Particularly as a member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and who comes from a family that just happens to be American, because, you know, we're from New Mexico before the border moved, I think it really matters.

Reporter: When did the border move?

Rep. Randall: It's been a long time, pre-civil war. But my family…

Reporter: [inaudible]

Rep. Randall: I'm agnostic on that, but my family was on that land when it was not the United States, they were on that land when it became the United States. And we are American because of that. You know, there are arbitrary things that determine people's ability to access opportunity and health care and freedom. I'm not arguing that we give up our sovereign borders, but I am saying that there's a matter of luck that is at play here, matter of luck of where you were born and what those borders look like when you're there.

Reporter: Are you hopeful real change is going to happen here in the next three years?

Rep. Randall: I am. It takes some work to stay hopeful. But you know, the feeling of the American people from the 2024 election cycle to now has changed dramatically on the President's immigration policies.

You know, the American people, including many Latinos, believed the President when he said he was going to go after the worst of the worst criminals. He was going to make our streets safer. He was going to make our

communities safer. But what we have seen over the last year is that he is going after abuelas and working people and showing up at job sites and making it harder for farmers to feed our country, and making it harder for fish processing plants to operate, and making it unsafe for children to feel like they can go to school, and people to feel like that they can go to the food bank to access the resources that they need to feed their family.

He is making our communities less safe. He's making it less likely for neighbors to call the police if something happens, because they are afraid that their family or their neighbors will end up in this facility for who knows how long.

Reporter: [inaudible]

Rep. Randall: I believe everyone deserves due process. That's not what's happening. That's not what's happening.

Reporter: But some people have had due process.

Rep. Randall: But this is not a prison. This is not a prison. This is a civil detention facility. If someone has committed a crime, they should be held accountable. That's true. If that is the determination of a judge, yes. But if we are arbitrarily rounding people up and putting them on planes to countries that are not their country, that doesn't feel like a reasonable immigration system to me, and it doesn't feel like a reasonable immigration system to the American people.