



## IMMIGRANT DETENTION MESSAGING PILLARS

(Last updated January 2026)

**ABOUT:** Research continues to show that messaging is most effective as a comprehensive package. Utilizing the VPSA structure (see [DWN's Communities Not Cages Core Narrative](#)), contextualizing people in community, using people centered language, and other key recommendations from Detention Watch Network's [Seeding Change Toolkit](#) (request password by emailing [cperez@detentionwatchnetwork.org](mailto:cperez@detentionwatchnetwork.org) ) are essential to our narrative gains. This document, however, is aimed at boiling our key detention related narratives down with a supporting messaging table.

**OVERARCHING MESSAGE:** Trump's cruel mass detention and deportation agenda has reached a previously unimaginable scope and scale. The human toll and cost to all Americans continues to be shocking.

### **DWN'S TOP DETENTION NARRATIVES:**

1. Trump's unprecedented agenda is unmistakably authoritarian.
2. The Trump administration is exacerbating unconscionable conditions in a detention system that is proven to be inherently inhumane.
3. The Trump administration is ruthlessly pursuing a multi-layered detention expansion plan, skyrocketing the number of people in detention.
4. ICE is operating with unprecedented funding, now the largest federal law enforcement agency in the US, running the largest immigrant detention system in the world.
5. Trump's explosive growth of immigration detention comes at the expense of all Americans as people lose health care, struggle to pay rent, and kids go hungry. [can add dependent on timing: families worry over emergency preparedness and response amidst hurricane season [historic flooding, wildfire season].

- 6. Immigrants are vital and valued members of our communities and we demand elected leaders at all levels reject Trump’s mass detention and deportation agenda.

**BREAKING IT DOWN — NARRATIVES PAIRED WITH SUPPORTIVE MESSAGES:**

<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Message(s)</b>
<p>Trump’s unprecedented agenda is unmistakably authoritarian.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make no mistake, as a nation we are at a critical inflection point. People are dying in detention, ICE agents are tearing families apart and shooting people on the streets, making communities across the country less safe, and causing chaos wherever they go - whether it's Minneapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles or beyond. We mourn the preventable death of Renee Nicole Good, killed by ICE in Minneapolis, and the growing death toll at the hands of ICE.</li> <li>• In 2025 the Trump administration deployed the National Guard in Washington, DC, Chicago, Portland, Memphis, and Los Angeles, in an unprecedented attack on U.S. cities, causing chaos and sparking swift backlash. In July 2025, Trump authorized the deployment of the National Guard in 20 states at ICE detention centers, including Florida, Georgia, Virginia, Texas and Louisiana. Using the military to supercharge the already massive police presence in communities further entrenches the police state across the country.</li> <li>• It’s clear the Trump regime is acting with impunity, without fear of rebuke or consequence. They are actively pumping out propoganda to deny wrongdoing and evade accountability.</li> <li>• Suppression of dissent to silence political opposition is a key tactic of the Trump regime. Trump has targeted anyone who disagrees with him including activists, elected officials, and judges. Last year, ICE arrested Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and the DOJ filed charges against Congresswoman LaMonica McIver for conducting oversight on ICE facilities in New Jersey. DHS also violently removed Sen. Alex Padilla from a public press conference for asking a question about ICE operations. We are seeing major media outlets begin to capitulate to the regime, including CBS news, who cancelled a major segment that would shine a light on the regime’s atrocious policy sending people to El Slavador’s megaprison</li> </ul>

Narrative	Message(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Trump regime has also intentionally withheld information about its immigration enforcement plans. This, paired with ICE's culture of secrecy, is yet another hallmark of an authoritarian regime, disappearing people and putting lives in jeopardy.</li> </ul>
<p>The Trump administration is exacerbating the unconscionable conditions in a detention system that is proven to be inherently inhumane.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICE kills — full stop. Whether ICE is targeting people in the streets, where they work or live or behind closed doors in one of its nearly 200 abuse-ridden detention centers across the country – ICE is an inherently violent agency jeopardizing families and community safety.</li> <li>• Detention is deadly: Shockingly, in 2025 31 people died in ICE custody — an all-time high. Just 10 days into 2026 six people died in ICE custody.</li> <li>• ICE subjects people to medical neglect, overcrowding, horrendous conditions of confinement, and rampant transfers that disappear people into the detention system, sowing confusion and cutting people off from their loved ones and support networks.</li> <li>• People in immigration detention are describing it as 'hell on earth' because it is. What we're seeing now is a heightened cruelty under the Trump administration.</li> </ul>
<p>The Trump administration is ruthlessly pursuing a multi-layered detention expansion plan, skyrocketing the number of people in detention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICE, which already operates the largest detention system in the world, plans to at least double its capacity to detain upwards of 110,000 people this year. To put this into perspective, Texas alone will have the capacity to detain at least 37,000 people, more than the entire detention system's funded capacity for 10 of the last 15 years.</li> <li>• <a href="#">At 73,000</a> (as of 1/16/26), the number of people in detention is at an all-time high.</li> <li>• Trump recently announced plans to use industrial warehouses to detain over 80,000 people nationwide, deepening the cruelty of the detention system. People are not commodities to be shipped, discarded, and profited off of. Subjecting people to large-scale, makeshift warehouse facilities will exponentially increase the likelihood for abuse and death in ICE custody, as people are cut off from their loved ones and support networks.</li> <li>• Trump has proliferated ICE operations into other government agencies,</li> </ul>

Narrative	Message(s)
	<p>including the Bureau of Prisons and the Department of Defense, using military bases as deportation hubs and growing ICE partnerships with local sheriffs and county jails. The administration has expanded surveillance, brought back family detention, incarcerated people in an abusive mega-prison in El Salvador, carried out third country deportations and increased neighborhood and workplace raids that destabilize communities and disappear people, including activists who oppose Trump’s agenda. People are then funneled into ICE’s network of private prisons, county jails, state and federal prisons, and makeshift detention camps, often sowing fear and confusion with facility transfers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● GEO Group, CoreCivic and other private contractors are teeming over Trump’s continued expansion of ICE detention and particularly at the prospect of cashing in on their vacant prisons. The perverse financial incentives are glaring as private prison companies rake in millions at the expense of people’s lives and communities that are pigeonholed to rely on a carceral economy.</li> <li>● Since January, ICE has initiated at least 136 new detention contracts, including 59 new facilities, and an additional 77 reopened facilities that are now detaining people for ICE after not doing so for years. Among these new contracts and facilities, the following alarming patterns are emerging (more information <a href="#">here</a>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ State governors are proactively offering active and shuttered state prisons or state-run detention camps for immigration detention,</li> <li>○ Additional detention capacity being secured through “ICE riders” to existing Intergovernmental Agreements with US Marshals Service</li> <li>○ Using military bases to expand immigration detention</li> <li>○ Detaining people in facilities in at least 19 states with active ICE detention contracts that have not detained people for ICE in years.</li> <li>○ Activating or considering facilities that ICE previously paused usage or terminated contracts with due to systemic abuse and horrific conditions</li> <li>○ Prioritizing the use of mega facilities to detain thousands of people, some of which are being used or considered for family detention.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Narrative	Message(s)
<p>ICE is operating with unprecedented funding, now the largest federal law enforcement agency in the US, running the largest immigrant detention system in the world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shockingly, ICE's budget now <a href="#">exceeds many militaries' budgets around the world</a>. The reconciliation bill passed in June provided an appalling \$150 billion for the targeting, detention, and deportation of people including \$45 billion for ICE detention to detain hundreds of thousands of families and adults over the next four years. This bill was 13 times ICE's current fiscal budget which was already operating at a historic high, and was in addition to ICE's annual budget that Congress greenlights each year. The MAGA-backed funding bill skyrocketed ICE's budget to never-before-seen levels. It is truly unprecedented and will go down in history as a seismic betrayal in how taxpayer dollars are spent to fuel cruel targeting, detention, and deportation at the expense of the needs of communities across the country, including Medicaid, school meals, and housing.</li> <li>• Currently, Congress's fiscal year 2026 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill is slated to further increase ICE's already bloated budget, allowing ICE to continue expanding its detention capacity at a time when people are dying in the system at a record pace. The proposal on the table includes additional funding for immigration enforcement to target, detain, and deport people on top of the \$45 billion that ICE was given last year through the reconciliation bill. With this unprecedented funding, ICE has wreaked havoc across our country targeting, arresting, and locking up individuals in a deadly and inhumane detention system. Giving ICE more money on top of its already historic budget will only escalate communities being terrorized and families being torn apart and subjected to horrific detention conditions.</li> </ul>
<p>Trump's explosive growth of immigration detention comes at the expense of all Americans as people lose health care, struggle to pay rent, kids go hungry, and families worry over</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trump's cruel mass detention and deportation agenda is being executed at the expense of Americans receiving lifesaving healthcare and millions of kids having school lunches.</li> <li>• People are struggling right now, and the Trump administration is to blame. Trump exploits people's concerns about their economic situation by scapegoating immigrants for problems where our leaders have failed us, including but not limited to the housing crisis, opioid crisis, and rising costs at</li> </ul>

Narrative	Message(s)
<p>emergency preparedness and response amidst historic flooding and wildfires nationwide.</p>	<p>the grocery store.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>(FEMA) Trump has diverted personnel from FEMA for immigration enforcement, cruelly prioritizing the terrorization, detention, and deportation of immigrants over disaster preparedness and recovery.</i></li> <li>● <i>(FEMA) We all deserve critical government services - funded by our tax dollars - that will be there to support our communities when natural disaster strikes.</i></li> <li>● <i>(FEMA) It is despicable that during hurricane season and amidst historic flash floods that have devastated the country, sweeping away kids from their camps, homes, and loved ones, that Trump's Department of Homeland Security would force FEMA employees to abandon that critical work in order to carry out the administration's mass detention and deportation agenda.</i></li> </ul>
<p>Immigrants are vital and valued members of our communities and we demand elected leaders at all levels reject Trump's mass detention and deportation agenda.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● People across the country are uniting to protect their family members, neighbors, and friends. In the face of the administration's unrelenting expansion of immigration detention, communities across the country are demanding to shut down detention centers and halt detention expansion.</li> </ul>

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