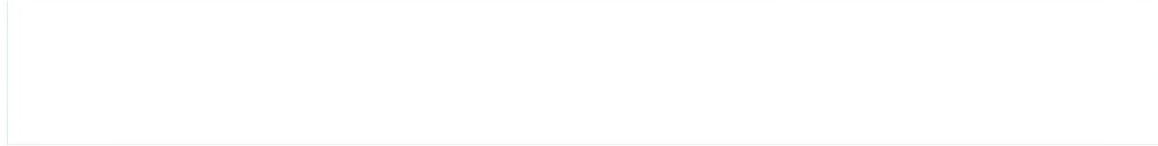




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Another immigrant dies in ICE custody in California, this time in the Imperial Valley

By [Kori Suzuki](#) / South Bay and Imperial Valley Reporter

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Another immigrant dies in ICE custody in California, this time in the Imperial Valley



Another immigrant has died in the custody of federal immigration authorities — this time in Imperial County. As Kori Suzuki reports, it was the second in-custody death in California in two weeks.

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Another immigrant died in the custody of federal immigration authorities in California, raising new questions about the care of detainees amid the Trump administration's historic mass deportation campaign.

In an [announcement](#), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said Huabing Xie, an immigrant from China, had a seizure Friday at the Imperial Regional Detention Facility in Calexico and died that afternoon.

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Xie had been detained at the Calexico detention center since last month. ICE alleged that Xie was in the U.S. without legal status and said federal agents arrested him on Sept. 12 in Indio.

Staffers at the center gave Xie CPR and used a [defibrillator](#), a medical device typically used to shock a patient's heart, according to ICE. But Xie was later pronounced dead at El Centro Regional Medical Center.

Imperial County immigrants' rights advocates said they were saddened and angered by the news. Imperial Liberation Collaborative organizer Marina Arteaga said Xie's death fit into a pattern marked by dwindling oversight and increasingly harsh conditions at federal detention centers across the country.

"This is not an isolated incident," Arteaga told KPBS on Monday.

Arteaga and other immigrants' rights advocates are demanding that ICE release more details and calling on state and county authorities to investigate Xie's death.

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On Monday, ICE said an investigation was underway but declined to answer further questions.

Xie's case was the second reported death of an immigrant in ICE custody in California in two weeks.

On Sept. 21, 39-year-old Ismael Ayala-Urbe died inside ICE's detention center in the High Desert city of Adelanto after developing a cough and fever. ICE has also [said](#) they are investigating Ayala-Urbe's death.

The incidents come amid what several Democratic senators have called [the deadliest six-month period for immigrants](#) in federal detention nationwide since 2018.

ICE has publicly reported that at least 14 people have died in its custody since January. In a letter earlier this year, Georgia Sens. Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock said the agency had also [failed to acknowledge](#) a fifteenth death at a county jail in New York State.

(ICE has since publicly confirmed that death but has yet to list it on the agency's official detainee death tracking page as of Monday.)

Ayala-Urbe and Xie bring the total to 17.

Deaths in ICE custody are climbing again. Democratic senators have called the first half of 2025 the deadliest six-month period for immigrants in federal detention nationwide since 2018.

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That string of in-custody deaths comes as ICE races to expand its massive detention network. Flush with [\\$45 billion in new funding from Congress](#), the agency is building new tent camps and expanding its use of military bases in a mad rush to fulfill President Donald Trump's vow of mass deportations.

In Imperial County, Arteaga said that rush has also come with a crackdown on transparency.

Artega and the Collaborative have been visiting the Imperial County detention center since 2022 to spend time with detainees and document their experiences. They were completely shut out as of this August, she said.

“We have not been able to go inside the facility,” Artega said. “We don't know what's going on.”

What we know about Xie's death

Beyond what ICE has already described, the circumstances of Xie's death are unclear.

A spokesperson for El Centro Regional Medical Center reached by phone Friday also declined to comment.

One important question, [Imperial Valley Equity and Justice Coalition](#) executive director Daniela Flores said, is whether immigration agents used force against Xie during his arrest or detention.

Another question, she said, is whether Xie had any existing medical conditions that could lead to seizures — and whether he reported any symptoms to staff at the detention center.

“That is putting myself into his family's shoes,” Flores said. “Knowing that they probably want answers.”

Earlier this year, the California Attorney General's office [found](#) that the Imperial County detention center was struggling to hire a medical director, leading to “delays in addressing clinical errors by lower-level health staff.”

Flores is asking state Attorney General Rob Bonta and the Imperial County public health officials to investigate.

In its statement Friday, ICE said U.S. Border Patrol agents first arrested Xie in 2023 near the eastern San Diego County town of Tecate. The agency said Xie was placed in

KPBS could not locate any criminal records for Xie.

Local officials face calls for accountability

To Flores and Arteaga, Xie's death highlights a lack of oversight of the Imperial Regional Detention Facility by elected officials.

The detention center is run by Management and Training Corporation (MTC), a private, for-profit company based in Centerville, Utah. The facility holds up to 782 detainees. In 2022, ICE [reported](#) that it spent more than \$44 million on the facility every year.

The detention center has faced allegations of abuse in the past. In 2021, Carlos Murillo Vega, who grew up in Imperial County, [sued MTC](#) for holding him in solitary confinement for over a year. In 2022, nine detainees said in a [civil rights complaint](#) that their cells were moldy and the water tasted like bleach.

California has given county officials the power to inspect ICE detention centers in their jurisdiction. But Imperial County and most others have not used that power, [Calmatters reported earlier this month](#).

In an email to KPBS, Calexico Mayor Diana Noricumbo said the detention center is located in an unincorporated part of the city, outside their jurisdiction.

KPBS also reached out to Imperial County's five supervisors and a county spokesperson. None responded to questions by publication time.

Tags

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Kori Suzuki

Kori Suzuki covers South San Diego County and the Imperial Valley for KPBS. He reports on the decisions of local government officials with a particular focus on environmental issues, housing affordability, and race and identity. He is especially drawn to stories that show how we are all complicated and multidimensional.

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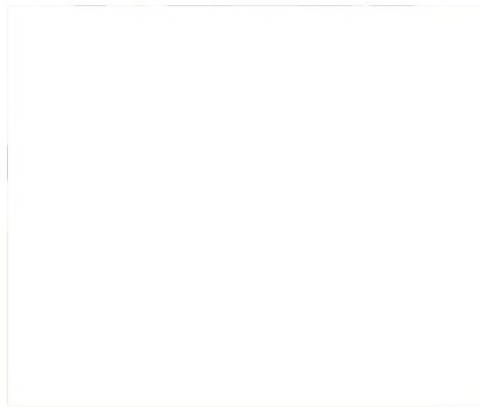
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