

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-153](#), a report to congressional requesters.

## Why GAO Did This Study

DHS has reported that the number of noncitizens in immigration detention has increased from about 230,000 in fiscal year 2005 to about 440,600 in fiscal year 2013. ICE applies various sets of detention standards—such as medical services—at over 250 facilities owned by ICE or private contractors, or owned by or contracted to state and local governments. GAO was asked to examine differences in cost, standards, and oversight across types of facilities.

This report addresses the extent to which (1) ICE has processes to track costs, (2) standards vary across facility types and the reasons for any differences, and (3) oversight and the results of that oversight vary across facility types. GAO reviewed ICE data and information on costs, detention population, standards, and oversight for 166 facilities that held detainees for 72 hours or more, from fiscal years 2011 through 2013, reviewed facility contracts, and interviewed federal contractors and DHS and ICE officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that ICE assess the extent to which it has appropriate controls for tracking facility costs, document reasons why facilities cannot be transitioned to the most recent standards, and review reasons for differences in inspection results. DHS concurred with all recommendations but one to document reasons why facilities cannot be transitioned to the most recent standards because, among other reasons, DHS believes it already has sufficient documentation. As discussed in this report, GAO continues to believe in the need for such documentation.

View [GAO-15-153](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or [gambler@gao.gov](mailto:gambler@gao.gov).

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## IMMIGRATION DETENTION

### Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Management and Oversight of Facility Costs and Standards

## What GAO Found

Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) uses two different methods to collect and assess data on detention costs; however, these methods do not provide ICE with complete data for managing detention costs across facilities and facility types. One method uses the agency's financial management system to estimate total detention costs per detainee per day for the purposes of developing ICE's annual detention budget request. However, ICE identified errors in the entry of data into this system and limitations in the system make it difficult for ICE to accurately record expenditures for individual facilities. ICE's other method involves the manual tracking of monthly costs by individual facilities for the purposes of reviewing data on individual facility costs. However, this method does not include data on all costs for individual facilities, such as for medical care and transportation, and such costs are not standardized within or across facility types. Thus, ICE does not have complete data for tracking and managing detention costs across facilities and facility types. ICE has taken some steps to strengthen its financial management system, such as implementing manual work-arounds to, among other things, better link financial transactions to individual facilities. However, ICE has not assessed the extent to which these manual work-arounds position ICE to better track and manage costs across facilities or facility types and the extent to which additional controls are needed to address limitations in its methods for collecting and assessing detention costs, in accordance with federal internal control standards. Conducting these assessments could better position ICE to have more reliable data for tracking and managing costs across facility types.

GAO's analysis of ICE facility data showed that ICE primarily used three sets of detention standards, with the most recent and rigorous standards applied to 25 facilities housing about 54 percent of ICE's average daily population (ADP) as of January 2014. ICE plans to expand the use of these standards to 61 facilities housing 89 percent of total ADP by the end of fiscal year 2014; however, transition to these standards has been delayed by cost issues and contract negotiations and ICE does not have documentation for reasons why some facilities cannot be transitioned to the most recent standards in accordance with internal control standards. Documenting such reasons could provide an institutional record and help increase transparency and accountability in ICE's management of detention facilities.

GAO's analysis of ICE facility oversight programs showed that ICE applied more oversight mechanisms at facilities housing the majority of the ADP in fiscal year 2013. For example, 94 percent of detainees were housed in facilities that received an annual inspection. GAO's analysis of ICE's inspection reports showed that inspection results differed for 29 of 35 facilities inspected by both ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) and Office of Detention Oversight (ODO) in fiscal year 2013. ICE officials stated that ODO and ERO have not discussed differences in inspection results and whether oversight mechanisms are functioning as intended. Assessing the reasons why inspection results differ, in accordance with internal control standards, could help ICE better ensure that inspection mechanisms are working as intended.