



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Advocacy results in ICE releasing seriously ill man from Stewart Detention Center**

*Egido Gonzalez Tacen had complications from uncontrolled diabetes and hernia surgery*

Egido Gonzalez Tacen was released from Stewart Detention Center on March 15, following an advocacy campaign by El Refugio, Siembra NC, and 54 partner organizations to free him so he could seek medical care for uncontrolled diabetes and complications from recent hernia surgery.

Advocates called and emailed Thomas P. Giles, Atlanta ICE Field Office Director, on March 15, demanding he stop Mr. Gonzalez Tacen's deportation, scheduled for March 19, and instead release him to his family in North Carolina. The advocates sent a [letter](#), signed by 56 organizations, detailing Gonzalez Tacen's worsening medical condition and expressing fear that he would die without appropriate treatment.

Mr. Gonzalez Tacen's blood sugar levels were dangerously high, and he was experiencing numbness and tingling in one leg, which prevented him from walking, as well as deteriorating vision. He was also in severe pain from complications from a recent hernia surgery.

ICE drove Mr. Gonzalez Tacen and several other people who were released to the Atlanta airport on Mar. 15, where he was met by volunteers from Casa Alternativa in Decatur, which provides post-release support in partnership with Paz Amigos in Columbus and El Refugio. His wife picked him up at Casa Alternativa, and they drove home to North Carolina.

Mr. Gonzalez Tacen had been detained at Stewart Detention Center since November 20, 2020. He continually requested medical care, which was delayed and inadequate. On April 20, 2020, a federal district court ruling, *Fraihat v. ICE*, granted a nationwide

preliminary injunction requiring ICE to take steps to protect medically fragile people from COVID-19. As a clear member of the Fraihat class, Mr. Gonzalez Tacen should have been immediately released. Instead CoreCivic, the private company that owns and operates Stewart Detention Center, denied him the medical care he needed to manage his diabetes and complications from hernia surgery, which was performed on December 10, 2020.

El Refugio repeatedly contacted the warden at Stewart Detention Center regarding Mr. Gonzalez Tacen's case, yet his health continued to worsen.

Dr. Sara Pullen, DPT, MPH, said on March 15 about Mr. Gonzalez Tacen's situation: "His medical conditions require skilled intervention, which may not be available upon deportation. These medical issues may place him at increased risk for COVID-19. The risk of COVID-19 transmission may be heightened in a detention center setting with limited social distancing opportunities. Stewart Detention Center has reported four deaths and 490 confirmed cases of COVID-19, which is higher than any other ICE facility."

In addition to demanding the cancellation of his scheduled deportation and immediate release, advocates said ICE should investigate CoreCivic's actions in this case that led to such a dire situation.

"Mr. Gonzalez Tacen was left to suffer in extreme pain and fear for his life for months while ICE continued to detain him," said Amilcar Valencia, Executive Director of El Refugio. "CoreCivic showed callous disregard for his life, but Mr. Gonzalez Tacen wanted very much to live and fought for his freedom so he could access quality medical care."

Said Kelly Morales, Executive Director of Siembra NC: "Time and time again we see how ICE and Stewart Detention Center put lives at risk. They did not make Mr. Gonzalez Tacen safe. They do not make our communities safe. We will continue to work to expose the violations of human rights by ICE and CoreCivic."

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**El Refugio** provides hospitality, visitation, and support to immigrants at Stewart Detention Center and their loved ones.

**Siembra NC** is a grassroots organization focused on defending our communities from ICE, abusive employers and landlords, and bad políticos.