

JUN  
2023

# THE LAST OF ITS KIND IN CALIFORNIA

## Lessons From The Termination of the ICE Contract at the Yuba County Jail

Closing ICE Detent  
Respect Community

**YUBA LIBERATION COALITION**

YUBA LIBERATION, CONTRACT TERMINATION!

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# About the Yuba Liberation Coalition

The Yuba Liberation Coalition (YLC), formerly Somos 15 and then Free The Yuba 11, was created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when legal service providers, organizers, and advocates joined efforts to free as many people from ICE custody at Yuba County Jail (YCJ) as possible. For two years the Yuba Liberation Coalition worked closely with currently and formerly detained individuals, faith groups, grassroots and immigrants' rights organizations, and community members to fight for the liberation of everyone in immigrant custody at the Yuba County Jail and to terminate the contract between the jail and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Organizations that make up the Yuba Liberation Coalition include the ACLU of Northern California, California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice, Carlos Saucedo, Faithful Friends, and Pangea Legal Services.

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## Acknowledgments

We want to thank the organizations, communities, and individuals that fought tirelessly for decades to end the contract between Yuba County Jail and ICE and laid the foundation for the Yuba Liberation Coalition's work. To them, and to all other site fights that nurture our knowledge, strategies, and actions, we express our sincerest gratitude.

Above all, we thank currently and formerly detained individuals for sharing their stories with us and leading us in the fight for liberation.

The work doesn't stop until everyone is free.

# Introduction

For nearly 30 years, ICE detained immigrants at the Yuba County Jail (YCJ) in Marysville, California. YCJ gained notoriety due to its appalling conditions, which have been well-documented over the years and which resulted in a consent decree, multiple hunger strikes, and tragically, numerous deaths.

In 2020, in response to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of organizations came together to form what would become the Yuba Liberation Coalition. This brief outlines strategies and lessons the coalition learned throughout the years, with the intention of assisting other campaigns focused on liberation and the closure of detention centers.

In February 2023, the ICE detention contract with YCJ formally terminated, effectively ending immigrant detention in Northern California. We believe the combination of community engagement, communications strategies, legal/organizing partnerships, and federal and local advocacy was what resulted in the coalition's success. Although we may never know exactly why ICE finally decided to terminate the contract, we believe every strategy played a role in making our victory possible.

As we celebrate the closure of Yuba County Jail as a detention center, we acknowledge that the fight is far from over. We remain committed to the ongoing struggle and hope that this brief provides valuable insights into both our achievements and the limitations we faced, serving as a resource for future liberation endeavors.

**This brief outlines strategies and lessons the coalition learned throughout the years, with the intention of assisting other campaigns focused on liberation and the closure of detention centers.**

# Abolitionist Victories: A Decade of ICE Detention Contract Shutdowns Across California

In the last decade, the ICE detention landscape in California has transformed in profound ways. This prompts two important reflections: First, while the persistence of ICE detention in California can feel like a poison that is impossible to purge, when we take a longer, historical view we are reminded that, in recent years, there have been many victories against immigration detention in California. Second, the February 2023 termination of the Inter-Governmental Service Agreement (IGSA) between ICE and Yuba County Jail is only one piece of a larger vision toward abolitionist justice—abolition of ICE detention, abolition of ICE enforcement, and abolition of all forms of state violence against people, including prisons and jails. It is important to remember the victories of the past because they remind us that just change is possible, and no detention contract—no matter how inevitable its existence seems today—lasts forever.

On February 8, 2023, ICE’s detention contract with Yuba County Jail officially terminated, ending nearly 30 years of immigration detention at the jail. Remarkably, this marks the ninth detention center in California to shut down in the last eleven years. The others were, in chronological order, the following:

1. **2012 termination: Mira Loma Detention Center**, in Lancaster, was a county jail operated by the LA County Sheriff’s Department. It could detain up to 1,400 people and operated as an immigration detention center beginning in 1997<sup>1</sup> until ICE terminated the contract in November 2012.<sup>2</sup>
2. **2017 termination: Santa Ana City Jail**, in Santa Ana, was a jail operated by the City of Santa Ana as an ICE detention center. At times, up to two-thirds of the people detained in the Santa Ana City Jail were in ICE custody. Under the contract, ICE paid the City of Santa Ana an average of \$2 million per year. ICE terminated the contract in May 2017.<sup>3</sup>

**It is important to remember the victories of the past because they remind us that just change is possible, and no detention contract—no matter how inevitable its existence seems today—lasts forever.**

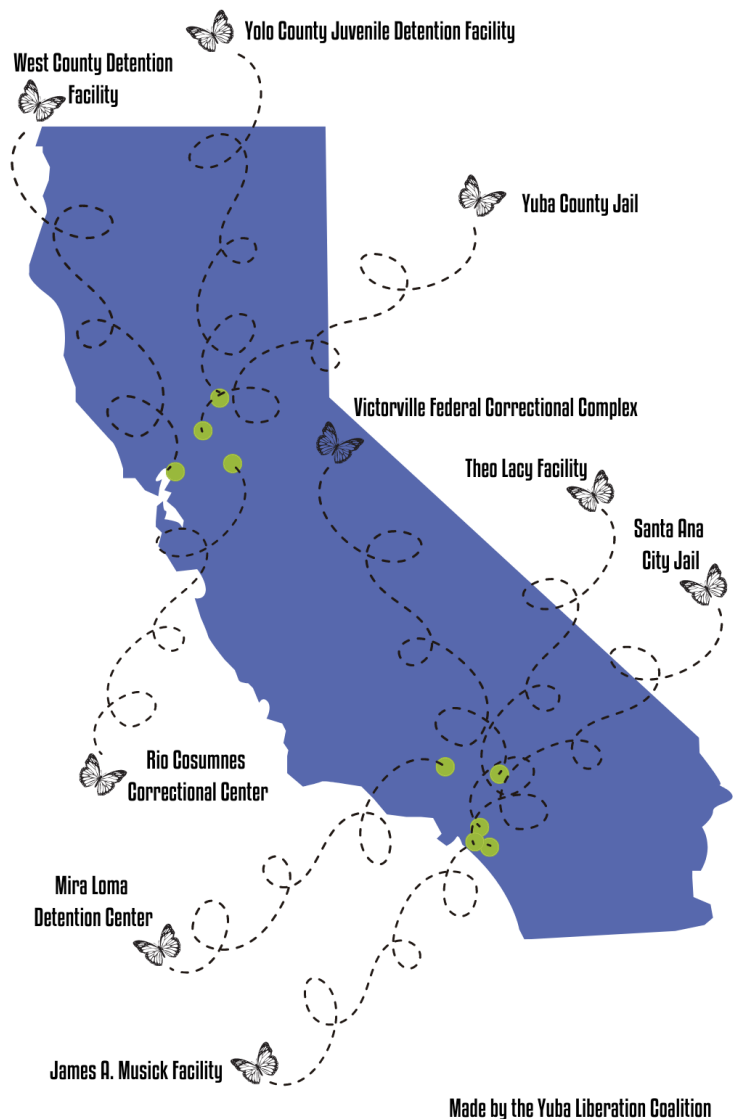
3. **2018 termination: Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC)**, in Elk Grove, was owned by Sacramento County and operated by the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department. In June 2018, Sacramento County supervisors voted not to renew the ICE detention contract with RCCC which was scheduled to expire at the end of that month.<sup>4</sup> Under the contract, ICE paid Sacramento County \$100 per detained person per day to detain up to 165 individuals at a time, or up to about \$6 million per year.<sup>5</sup>

4. **2018 termination: West County Detention Facility**, in Richmond, was a county jail owned by Contra Costa County and operated by the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office. In July 2018, the sheriff's office announced it would terminate its ICE detention contract, under which it detained an average of 200 individuals for ICE per day. Under the contract, Contra Costa County received about \$6 million per year from ICE, about half of

which was net profit. The contract officially terminated in November 2018.<sup>8</sup>

5. **2018 termination: Victorville Federal Correctional Complex**, in Victorville, was a medium-security federal prison operated by the federal Bureau of Prisons. In June 2018, the Trump administration abruptly sent about 1,000 people in ICE custody to the facility to be detained.<sup>6</sup> After a federal lawsuit and significant public outcry, the Trump administration appeared to abandon the attempt to detain immigrants at Victorville by October 2018.<sup>7</sup>

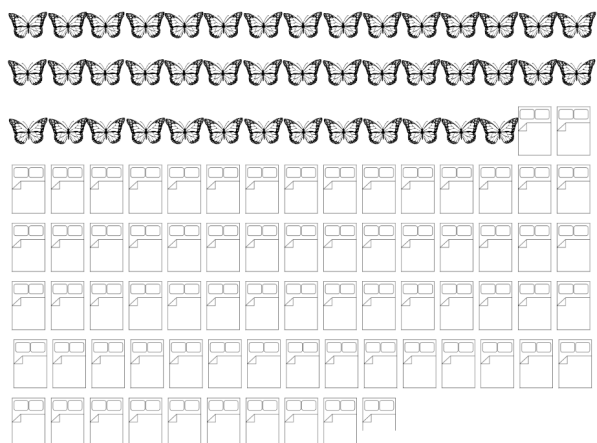
## Detention Center Closures in California 2012-2023



6. **2019 termination: James A. Musick Facility**, in Irvine, was a jail owned by Orange County and operated by the Orange County Sheriff's Department. The combined immigration detention capacity of the Musick and Theo Lacy Facilities was 958, and ICE paid the county \$118 per bed.<sup>9</sup> In March 2019, the Orange County Sheriff's Department announced it would terminate its contract with ICE, effective August 1, 2019.<sup>10</sup>
7. **2019 termination: Theo Lacy Facility**, in Orange, was a jail owned by Orange County and operated by the Orange County Sheriff's Department. The combined immigration detention capacity of Musick and Theo Lacy Facilities was 958, and ICE paid the county \$118 per bed.<sup>11</sup> In March 2019, the Orange County Sheriff's Department announced it would terminate its contract with ICE, effective August 1, 2019.<sup>12</sup>
8. **2020 termination: Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility**, in Yolo, was a county juvenile detention facility operated by the Yolo County Probation Department. It had a contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to detain up to 24 immigrant children ages 13 to 17.<sup>13</sup> Before it stopped detaining children immigrants, it was the only secure, locked detention facility for unaccompanied immigration children in California and one of only two such facilities in the country.<sup>14</sup> ORR paid Yolo County about \$5.7 million per year pursuant to this detention contract. On October 8, 2019, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors voted not to renew its contract with ORR, and the contract officially terminated on January 31, 2020.<sup>15</sup>


And finally, ICE announced it would terminate its contract to use Yuba County Jail as an immigration detention facility in December 2022. Yuba County Jail, which was owned by Yuba County and operated by Yuba County Sheriff's Department, could detain up to 210 individuals for ICE. ICE paid Yuba County over \$8.6 million per year under the guaranteed minimums provided in the IGSA. The detention contract finally terminated in February 2023.

**Detention beds no longer present in California thanks to detention center closures in the past decade.**



**KEY:**

 100 beds no longer used to detain people

 100 beds still used to detain people

**Since 2012, 4,299 beds are no longer in use by detention centers in California. As of May, 2023, 7,188 beds available for use to detain people in the state.**

As the previous recounting shows, the end of Yuba County Jail as an ICE detention facility is just one of the many abolitionist victories that impacted individuals, communities, and advocates have celebrated in the last decade. Remarkably, the termination of the Yuba County Jail contract now means that no county in California has an immigration detention contract with the federal government. All of the remaining ICE detention facilities in California are privately owned and operated. (Note: the City of Glendale appears to have an IGSA with ICE.<sup>16</sup> However, it has not actively detained immigrants in recent memory).

Today, there remain seven immigration detention centers in California—six active and one inactive. They are:

1. Adelanto ICE Processing Center in Adelanto, owned and operated by the private prison company the GEO Group (“GEO”).
2. Desert View Annex in Adelanto, owned and operated by GEO.
3. Golden State Annex in McFarland, owned and operated by GEO.
4. Imperial Regional Detention Facility in Calexico, owned by the Imperial Valley Gateway Center, LLC and operated by the private prison company Management and Training Corporation.
5. Mesa Verde ICE Processing Facility in Bakersfield, owned and operated by GEO.
6. Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego, owned and operated by the private prison company CoreCivic.
7. Central Valley Annex in McFarland, owned and operated by GEO. This facility has a detention capacity of 700,<sup>17</sup> but does not currently appear to be in use.

Previous shutdown fights and victories have shown us, over and over again, that ICE detention is not inevitable. It is possible for communities and advocates to target immigration detention facilities for closure, and to win. As we now close the chapter of Yuba County Jail’s existence as an ICE detention facility, we know we must tackle the remaining ICE detention facilities in our state and across the country with renewed resolve and determination.





# From Somos 15, To Free The Yuba 11, To Yuba Liberation Coalition

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Yuba County Jail detained up to 220 people in ICE custody. While some people were deported or released in a matter of days or weeks, others remained locked up at the Yuba County Jail for months or years while awaiting a final decision on their immigration case.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, immigrants' rights organizations in Northern California filed a class action lawsuit, *Zepeda Rivas v. Jennings*, No. 3:20-cv-02731-VC (filed N.D. Cal. Apr. 20, 2020) alleging that it was impossible to maintain social distance in jails and congregate settings, and that this violated detained persons' constitutional right to reasonable health and safety. Immigrants' rights organizations argued that the government needed to release detained immigrants to ensure their safety. A federal judge agreed, and implemented a bail application system to determine who should be released to decrease the population to safe levels at two ICE detention centers in California—Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center and Yuba County Jail.

*Zepeda Rivas* was filed in April 2020, when the number of detained immigrants at the Yuba County Jail was about 157 people. By February of 2021, pursuant to the bail application system and other safeguards the judge ordered, only 15 people remained detained by ICE at YCJ. The mass depopulation at the Yuba County Jail created an opportunity for immigrants' rights organizations to create stronger relationships with individuals who remained detained at Yuba County Jail, and to find creative ways to develop release campaigns for each of them.

## Somos 15

The Somos 15 Campaign launched in February 2021 with [a video](#) featuring the 15 men who remained detained at the jail, their families, and formerly



detained individuals. The two goals of the campaign were to pressure ICE to meet the urgent demands relating to COVID-19 safety from the Somos 15, and to release all members of the Somos 15 to their loved ones and communities.

Screenshot of Somos15 video that launched the campaign.

## Free The Yuba 11



Two months after the Somos 15 campaign launched, just eleven people remained in detention at the YCJ. However, despite minor changes at the facility, conditions inside the jail continued to be deplorable

and life-threatening, especially given the severity of the pandemic at the time. There was no way to guarantee people's safety inside Yuba County Jail. With this in mind, the campaign decided to shift its focus from improving conditions related to COVID-19 safety to demanding the immediate release of those detained at the facility and the termination of the contract between ICE and Yuba County Jail. The campaign changed its name to Free The Yuba 11.

The Free The Yuba 11 campaign prioritized centering and uplifting stories of those detained, and developing aggressive legal strategies to get them released. In the past, the large number of people detained at YCJ had made it very difficult for outside advocates to work closely with all detained individuals and to develop liberation campaigns that focused on their personal stories. With a smaller number of people detained at YCJ, there was a chance to develop trust between external supporters and detained individuals.

The Free The Yuba 11 campaign started on a celebratory note with the release of its first member and leader, Javier, through bond. Of the Free The Yuba 11 members, seven were released back to their communities and four were deported. Ricardo, the last Free The Yuba 11 member detained at YCJ, was released to his family on October 27, 2022. Thrillingly, the campaign had accomplished its goal of depopulating YCJ.

However, the contract between ICE and Yuba County Jail remained in effect and without the termination of the contract, repopulation continued to loom as a possibility. Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened: on December 27, 2022, two months after Ricardo was released and in the middle of the winter holidays, ICE began repopulating YCJ. The Free The Yuba 11 campaign members knew it was time to go back to the strategy board.



**Jonny, Laura (YLC member), Ricardo and Fredy at CCI Just Goals, Soccer Tournament for Liberation. Jonny, Ricardo and Fredy were formerly detained at Yuba and part of the Free The Yuba 11 Campaign.**

## Yuba Liberation Coalition

The Free The Yuba 11 campaign had decided to keep its name unchanged even as individuals were released or, unfortunately, at times deported. The campaign believed that changing the name each time someone left YCJ would create confusion and make it harder to gather social media posts and media stories featuring the campaign. However, once the last member of the Yuba 11 was released from the jail, and to reflect our concerns of repopulation, the Free The Yuba 11 changed its name to the Yuba Liberation Coalition, or the YLC.

The campaign re-launched in January 2022, when the population of people detained by ICE at YCJ was fluctuating between two and four. While working to develop trust with the detained individuals and brainstorming strategies for their release, we simultaneously turned much of our attention to the goal of ending the contract between the Yuba County Jail and ICE.

Long-term campaigns such as this require continuous assessment, strategic planning, and effective communication with the public to keep them informed of the campaign's progress. Throughout our campaign, collective liberation and contract termination were the two main objectives that guided our actions. Although the campaign changed in response to shifting circumstances over the years, we valued consistency and only made changes to our name, logo, and colors when there was a significant shift in the campaign's focus or direction. Staying true to our commitment, communicating our progress, and maintaining consistency in our messaging were crucial to reaching our ultimate goals of Yuba Liberation, Contract Termination.



Yuba Liberation Coalition Members at a protest outside of the Yuba County Government Center, March 22, 2022.

# Yuba County Jail: “Dehumanizing” and “Traumatizing”

“When I think about my time in Yuba County Jail—just hearing that, I want to cry. . . The first word that comes to mind is “dehumanizing.” The way they treated us was dehumanizing . . . It was traumatizing. I was punished for seeking a better future in another country.”

- Juan, formerly detained at YCJ

Yuba County is a largely rural county located approximately 40 miles north of Sacramento, the state capital of California. The county occupies a rich agricultural area, stretching down from the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountain range to the valley floor. This land covers the unceded territory of the indigenous Nisenan peoples, who faced extreme violence at the hands of European settler-colonists. Over 75 percent of Valley Nisenan died during the malaria epidemic of 1833, and nearly 98% of the remaining Valley and Hill Nisenan were killed or enslaved due to the gold rush.<sup>18</sup>

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Yuba County has a population of 81,575. The county has historically been a strongly Republican county, with voters electing Republicans in every presidential election since 1976. The county is currently represented by two Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Yuba County Jail (YCJ) is located in downtown Marysville, which has a population of 12,664 and is the county seat. Collusion between Yuba County and ICE began in the 1990’s in the wake of economic trouble for the county. After two catastrophic floods in 1986 and 1997 caused over \$395 million in damage, Yuba County struggled to recover financially. It was during this period, in 1994, that Yuba County began to detain immigrants for ICE in its county jail, which seemingly offered a quick solution for the county to recoup some of its financial losses.<sup>19</sup> Over the next few decades, the collusion between Yuba County and ICE grew in magnitude, increasing the financial dependence of Yuba County on this contract, as shown in the brief timeline below:

2004 - ICE and Yuba County Jail officially enter into an Inter-Governmental Service Agreement.

2008 - The IGSA is updated to increase bed capacity for ICE to 220.

2020 - The IGSA is amended to extend the contract to the year 2099, and to create a 150-bed “guaranteed minimum” at a rate of \$158.13 per bed per day.

These amendments ultimately resulted in an ICE detention contract worth \$23,719 a day, or over \$8.66 million a year, and a bed capacity that constituted half of the total bed capacity at YCJ.

Yuba County Jail has been notorious for its poor conditions, and individuals who have been forced to endure these conditions while in custody have long advocated for their rights. In 1976, a group of individuals detained in county custody filed a lawsuit in the Eastern District of California alleging that the conditions at the jail violated the U.S. Constitution, the California Constitution, and California state law. In 1979, the federal court approved a consent decree requiring Yuba County to remedy the constitutional and statutory violations, and appointed the law firm Rosen Bien Galvan & Grunfeld LLP (RBGG) to monitor conditions and issue periodic reports detailing YCJ's compliance with the agreement. The consent decree remains in effect to this day, despite Yuba County's attempts to terminate it. See *Mtn. to Terminate Consent Decree by Yuba Cnty.*, *Hedrick v. Grant*, No. 2:76-cv-00162-JAM-EFB, ECF 95 (E.D. Cal. May 13, 2013).

In January 2019, the consent decree was amended, requiring improvements to many aspects of jail operations, including exercise and recreation, staffing, medical and mental health care, environmental health and safety conditions, visitation, due process, administrative segregation and segregated housing, grievance procedures, access to legal materials and court, and training programs. Since then, RBGG's monitoring reports have identified continued violations in several areas of jail operations. A recent monitoring report, released in December 2022, only days before ICE announced it would terminate the IGSA, even found that the mortality rate for people detained in YCJ in the past year was over seven times the average of local jails in the U.S. In response to this, in March 2023 the court granted preliminary approval of the Second Amended Consent Decree, which will extend the decree until January 2025.

The ongoing consent decree at Yuba County Jail has made it clear that the facility is not fit to house anyone. Despite this, Yuba County was paid millions of dollars a year of federal funds to detain immigrants in abusive conditions. Immigrants detained at YCJ consistently reported inadequate conditions and abuse, including medical neglect, filthy laundry, sewage overflow, solitary con-

**The ongoing consent decree at YCJ has made it clear that the facility is not fit to house anyone. Despite this, Yuba County was paid millions of dollars a year of federal funds to detain immigrants in abusive conditions.**

finement, and lack of recreation opportunities.

Multiple individuals who had previously spent time at other local jails, state prisons, or immigration detention facilities reported that YCJ was the worst experience of incarceration they experienced. Many felt that the conditions at YCJ were intended to break them down, and reported instances of officers taunting and intimidating individuals in an attempt to pressure them to consent to deportation before their proceedings concluded.

In our advocacy work, knowing and understanding the deep history of Yuba County Jail's failure to care for those in their custody was crucial, and we highlighted these details in our calls to end the contract. While there is no adequate or just form of immigration detention, the conditions at YCJ emphasized the urgency of calling for the release of all immigrants detained by ICE. We continue to stand in solidarity with the broader abolition movement that seeks to end the incarceration of individuals everywhere.

**“I’ve been in two federal prisons, five [CA Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation] prisons, and two ICE facilities. Yuba is by far the worst.”**  
**-John, formerly detained at YCJ**



C-Pod inside of Yuba County Jail . Rows of bunk beds were spaced only 2 ft apart. (Courtesy of Rosen Bien Galvan & Grunfeld LLP)

**“I still have nightmares to this day; I suffer from anxiety and symptoms of PTSD because of the way our lives were disregarded, how we were treated like we were sub-human. I feel those traumatic memories will never go away. The way they treated us was like a game to them. Everything was a form of leverage to mistreat us so that we’d be miserable and agree to deportation. The medical care was terrible. You have to wait days for medical attention; they didn’t give you pain medication; some guys would have their teeth pulled out only with Tylenol that they had to beg for; sitting there bleeding out in pain with no proper pain medication. The jail itself is falling apart. The drains are so bad; sometimes, the floor drains would overflow with feces and come into our living space. **I feel like the conditions at Yuba County Jail are meant to break you, so that you give up your case and sign to be deported.**”**

**-Joe, formerly detained at YCJ**

“Recreation took place on the roof which is enclosed by four walls that are so tall **you can just barely see the tops of the trees and some sky through the barbed wire**. It felt like going into a mega-cell compared to the cell you are usually in; it makes you feel very tiny. The cells had cockroaches. Sometimes they would pop up and wiggle their antennas; huge cockroaches like crickets. And you’d smash them and all this gooey stuff would come out.”

- Alex, formerly detained at YCJ

“I could not believe how dirty Yuba County was. I was housed in the ‘old’ part of the jail, which has bars for barriers or walls. **There was dust and mold everywhere**. The cleaning supplies, which consisted of a broom, mop, toilet brush, and spray bottles, were not enough to even scratch the surface of the filth in there.”

- Jose formerly detained at YCJ

“When I arrived I had the unfortunate luck of being housed in the ‘old’ part of the jail, or the “dungeon” as they call it. **I couldn’t believe the smell or the sight of the jail**. In November of 2019 the floor drain in the tank I was in began to spew raw sewage all over the floor. . . . [The officer] told us to throw our blankets on the floor to soak it up . . . We asked the officer what he did with the blankets we used to soak it up, and **he told us they would get washed and get handed out again!** I couldn’t believe what he was saying.”

- J.M.R. formerly detained at YCJ

# From Detention to Liberation - Carlos, An Unwavering Organizer



**Carlos, formerly detained at YCJ, part of the YLC Coalition.**

Carlos Saucedo, a member of the Yuba Liberation Coalition, has been deeply impacted by the Yuba County Jail, both as someone who was detained there and as an organizer who has been dedicated to abolishing ICE detention. Carlos's insights as a leader both inside and outside of detention have played a pivotal role in the collective effort to end the ICE contract at the Yuba County Jail.

## **Detained at the Yuba County Jail**

Born in Honduras, Carlos migrated to Southern California at age 11 as a lawful permanent resident. His mother worked long hours to provide for the family, and he faced challenges fitting in as a young immigrant. Longing for community and support, Carlos connected with other young men in the neighborhood, and, at the age of 15, he committed a gang-related murder.

Tried as an adult, Carlos was sentenced to 15 years-to-life in prison. He spent more than two decades incarcerated, and yet, against all odds, he connected with others in spaces not hospitable to community building, earned his GED and a college education, became a substance abuse counselor, mentored young people so they might avoid the difficulties he had experienced, and fell in love and married.

After 22 years of imprisonment, Carlos was granted parole through a lengthy and rigorous process in 2017. The California Board of Parole Hearings agreed that Carlos was a changed man who should be released and able to reunite with his family and community. Carlos thought he was finally coming home, but instead he was transferred to ICE detention at the Yuba County Jail, where he was detained for more than two years.

While in ICE detention at the YCJ, Carlos was a natural leader who supported other people detained there, advocated for basic medical care for himself and others, and organized peaceful hunger strikes to raise awareness about dangerous conditions. He recalls one time when an officer yelled at and insulted a young man Carlos had recently befriended. The friend made a fist and went toward the officer. "I put my arms around him and said, 'Do you really want to go home? Because if you



assault this guard that will give him justification to further harm you. Breathe. Relax. They want to push you, but don't sacrifice your family in this moment of anger." With Carlos by his side, the man calmed down and unclenched his fist. Everyone celebrated when the young man was released on bond, two months later.

Throughout the time Carlos was detained at the YCJ, he describes that he "always chose to be a leader of peace." He repeatedly provided support to others, and organized inside to uphold the rights of all people. While in detention, an immigration judge granted Carlos protection from deportation under the Convention Against Torture. However, U.S. government attorneys appealed, and Carlos remained behind bars as his case continued to move through the court system. After more than two years detained in ICE custody, Carlos feared he would die there because the horrific conditions were taking a serious toll on his physical and mental health. He made the agonizing decision to sign papers to return to Honduras and fight his case from outside the U.S. Over three years later, the appeals process finally concluded with a decision from the Board of Immigration Appeals affirming the immigration judge's original decision, declaring that Carlos is protected under international law and cannot be deported from the United States. He is now fighting to [return home](#).



**Carlos and his wife, Yahaira, who has actively participated in the fight to end the Yuba-ICE Contract with the Yuba Liberation Coalition.**

### **Collective Action with the Yuba Liberation Coalition**

Shortly after Carlos was deported to Honduras, Susan Lange, the coordinator of the Faithful Friends/Amigos Fielles visitation program and a founding member of the YLC, reached out with an idea: Would Carlos be interested in joining the Coalition? Carlos recounts how this invitation came at a critical moment for him—isolated and housebound because of threats to his life in Honduras, Carlos was eager to join others in the collective fight to end the ICE contract. Having spent such a long period detained at the YCJ, Carlos understood firsthand the struggles of people in detention. He was in a unique position to provide insights about the dangerous conditions there and effective strategies to end the contract.

As a member of the Yuba Liberation Coalition, Carlos participated in and led a number of actions that brought attention to the violence detained immigrants faced at the jail. He authored an [opinion piece](#) for the San Francisco Chronicle describing the unbearable conditions there and how, of the 12 different prisons where he had been incarcerated, the Yuba County Jail “was worse than all of them.” He worked with other members of the YLC to host virtual events, including [Instagram Live conversations](#) with other formerly detained individuals. Behind the scenes, he connected with individuals currently and formerly detained at YCJ to provide support and solidarity.



Edwin Carmona-Cruz (top) and Carlos Saucedo (bottom), speaking at the Cafeteando con los 11 Instagram Live Series with the Somos 11

On the day Carlos learned that the contract had ended, he recalls experiencing mixed emotions: it was

painful to remember the humiliation he had experienced at the jail, but he was also “filled with joy.” He describes how it was such a relief to learn that no one else would again face the suffering that he and so many others had experienced while in ICE detention at the YCJ. “Nobody will ever have to go through that again . . . I felt the joy of knowing that the abuse wouldn’t happen again to another person.”

A fierce community leader and inspiring mentor to so many, Carlos is committed to making a positive impact in the world and helping others avoid the challenges he has faced since first migrating as a child. Today, Carlos is living in exile in a third country as he pursues a pardon from California Governor Gavin Newsom and other legal avenues to return home to the United States and be reunited with his family. The contract at the YCJ has ended, and no one will again be detained by ICE there. Still, as the Yuba Liberation Coalition celebrates this victory, we recognize that to attain full liberation from Yuba County Jail, we must continue fighting to [bring Carlos home](#).



YLC members connecting Carlos to the Yuba-ICE Contract Termination Celebration through the phone.

# THE FIGHT FOR LIBERATION: STRATEGIES TO END THE YUBA-ICE CONTRACT

Community Engagement  
Communications  
Legal/Organizing Partnerships  
Federal Advocacy  
Local Advocacy



# The Fight for Liberation: Strategies to End the Yuba-ICE Contract

Achieving this community win required a creative approach that consisted of constantly reflecting on and reassessing our strategy. This approach integrated legal, organizing, and advocacy strategies that, in combination, allowed us to achieve more than any one single approach could have. Our key targets in this fight were the Yuba County Board of Supervisors and ICE, since either had the power to end the detention contract with 60 days' notice. We also focused on secondary targets: potential influencers at the federal, state, and local level, including legislators and residents of Yuba County.

## Community Engagement Strategies

At the core of any campaign or movement for social justice is relationship building. By design, the isolation and cruel conditions of ICE detention break the mind, body, and soul of immigrants, sometimes forcing them to sign deportation papers and give up on their immigration case. We intentionally fostered relationships with those who are directly affected by immigration detention, their families, and community to build power from a place of love and trust. By getting to know them and following their leadership, we were also able to center their humanity in the campaign messaging.

When we became the #FreeTheYuba11 campaign, we saw an opportunity to build deeper relationships with those still detained and their families, to support organizing on the inside, and to advocate from the outside on their behalf. Furthermore, we knew that because formerly detained individuals best understood the injustices and the ideal solutions, our role was to support them to lead the fight to terminate the contract. The YLC provided organizing and mobilizing support, mutual aid, and stipends to the individuals and families who experienced emotional and financial hardship due to separation from their loved ones.

Volunteers with Faithful Friends, a community visitation group that works to end the isolation of immigrants in detention and was a core member of the YLC, regularly visited and wrote to individuals detained at the Yuba County Jail. The visits and letters brought hope and healing to impacted individuals and their families. The relationships built through visitation also informed organizing strategies, and facilitated connection, communication, and collaboration between and among attorneys, organizers, advocates, family members, and people in detention.

Although it was promising to see the jail being depopulated throughout 2022, it was psychologically difficult and isolating for the last few individuals to be released. Things were particularly challenging for Ricardo, the very last of the Yuba 11 detained in the jail. Ricardo was detained alone for about three weeks, and compared it to being in solitary confinement. His only meaningful forms of regular interaction with other people during this time were phone calls with his family and YLC members. Regular phone calls and precious visitation opportunities were crucial to lifting his spirits. Occasionally, one of the organizers played some of his favorite songs over the phone, showing how human connection of many sorts guided our efforts throughout the campaign to end the contract.

## Ricardo: “When voices come together”



Ricardo recalls the final weeks of ICE detention at the Yuba County Jail as harrowing. The last member of the Yuba 11 to be released, he spent nearly a month by himself, essentially in solitary confinement. He has difficult memories of the trauma of being alone at the jail, but he also remembers the many connections he had with people on the outside, especially through visits and phone calls with his loved ones, advocates, activists, and attorneys. Even when there was no one at the jail to connect with, visitation was suspended for stretches, or the telephones were not functioning, Ricardo knew he had the support of people on the outside: “I felt like I wasn’t alone.”

Ricardo was detained—and part of the movement to end contracts—at two different facilities. He was first detained at the West County Detention Facility in Richmond, California, and when the ICE contract ended in 2018, Ricardo was transferred to the Yuba County Jail. Ricardo recalls close to ten different hunger strikes at the YCJ—five of which he directly participated in—between 2018 and 2021. Actions inside of detention, along with protests and vigils outside of the jails where Ricardo was detained, played a significant role in ending both contracts.

Ricardo understands the successful efforts to end ICE detention at these two facilities as part of a larger project: “We have ended two contracts, and it’s possible to end more. ¡Sí, se puede! [Yes, we can!] We can continue to have success in other locations.” As Ricardo explains, when “voices come together” it is possible to end immigration detention. Ricardo sees the end of these two contracts as steps in a longer struggle: “We need to keep fighting until there is equality.”

The most successful community engagement strategies are transformative and not just transactional. For example, we helped build power among detained individuals and their families to assert their rights and fight for liberation by requesting meetings with their congressional representatives. Prior to meeting with their representatives or their staff, we conducted a

virtual Civics 101 training where family members learned who their representatives were, how to contact them, and how to prepare for a meeting. Previously, they were not always aware that they had city, county, state, and federal representatives and that they had the right to contact them. Furthermore, the coalition organized trainings with detained individuals and their families on how to effectively communicate with congressional representatives and their offices about the conditions inside the jail and the harm on families caused by immigration detention.

We also continued to build relationships with members of the broader advocacy community who shared the same vision and values—such as abolishing ICE and cages—but who were perhaps not familiar with ICE detention at Yuba County Jail. This grew the movement, increasing broad community support and demonstrating to the individuals inside and their families that they had an entire community behind them. We organized creative events and actions with media coverage to not only pressure our targets but also to grow our base of supporters.

Some of the actions and events we organized, often in collaboration with others, included:

## Vigils



Love and Liberation Vigil outside of YCJ, May 31, 2021

**Virtual Prayer Vigil (April 27, 2021):** Co-led by our partners at Interfaith Movement For Human Integrity (IM4HI), over 70 individuals participated in the interfaith vigil, among them were the 10 men who were being held in detention at YCJ, along with their relatives.

Following the vigil, Darwin, one of the detained individuals, expressed that he had not experienced such a strong sense of love and support in years.

**[Love and Liberation Interfaith Vigil \(May 31, 2021\):](#)** Faith leaders, organizers, and impacted community members gathered outside of the Yuba County Jail to demand the release of the remaining eight individuals detained at the Yuba County Jail and to call for justice for detained people and their families.

**United As One, For One (October 30, 2021):** The FreeTheYuba11 coalition participated in a statewide initiative hosting Día de Los Muertos vigils across California. The purpose of these vigils was to bring attention to the lives lost in detention centers and to demand the closure of all facilities in order to prevent further loss of life. Initially, this vigil was intended to honor Ricardo, who was still in detention at the time, and to demand his release. However, just three days before the event, Ricardo was released, which transformed the occasion into a joyous celebration.

**Prayer Ceremony (May 28 to June 1, 2022):** The YLC participated in the state-wide [Pilgrimage for a Better Future: From the Heartbreak of Immigrant Detention to Thriving Communities](#), organized by our partners at IM4HI, to the seven detention centers in California. We organized the stop at Yuba County Jail, where about 77 people gathered, including community members formerly detained at Yuba County Jail. Leading up to the launch of the pilgrimage, formerly detained individuals spoke at a congressional briefing to advocate for the termination of the ICE-YCJ contract.

## Protests

**#TerminateTheContract Press Conference (December 15, 2021):** About two months after successfully depopulating the ICE detention side of Yuba County Jail, we learned that ICE intended to repopulate the Yuba County Jail with immigrants in ICE custody on or around December 15, 2021. Therefore, we called a press conference and rally outside of the San Francisco ICE Field Office to #TerminateTheContract between ICE and the Yuba County Jail. Since it was close to the holidays, our Communications lead wrote a jingle to the tune of “The Twelve Days of Christmas” listing twelve reasons to end the ICE-YCJ contract, which we sang with the community at the rally.

**Direct Action - Board of Supervisors (March 22, 2022):** About 30 community members, including formerly detained individuals and family members of the #FreeTheYuba11 showed up outside of the Yuba County Government Building during a meeting of the Yuba County Board of Supervisors (the Board) to let them know we were paying attention, and call on them to end the contract. We asked attendees to write messages of hope and support for the three men who remained detained at the time, and to email/call the Yuba County Board and ICE urging them to release all individuals and terminate the contract. We followed up with a letter to the Board which included messages from attendees:

- “My beautiful children were harmed and deeply affected by the way they were treated inside Yuba County Jail. No more ICE, end the contract. Close Yuba forever.”
- “For all the children that have mothers and fathers detained by ICE. We are fighting so their home can be complete once more.”
- “Through this channel we ask that you please gain consciousness about the mistreatment going on at the jail. Our tax money should be for education, not for jails. We want the jail to be shut down.”



Supporters gather outside of the Yuba County Government Center,  
March 22, 2023

## Other Activities And Actions



Supporters gather outside of the ICE building in San Francisco, to demand the termination of the ICE contract. December 15, 2021

**#Yuba0 Week of Action (January 2022):** When we learned that four new individuals had been booked into YCJ after two months of no individuals in ICE custody, we launched a week of action to pressure congressional representatives who had publicly called for the end of the contract—including

then-Chair of the House Judiciary Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee, Zoe Lofgren—to do everything in their power to continue calling on Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Mayorkas to immediately terminate the contract with Yuba County Jail and ICE detention.

**Free Julio and Ankush (December 2022–January 2023):** On December 8, 2022, we heard the long-awaited announcement that ICE intended to end its contract with Yuba County in 60 days. At that time, two individuals remained in custody, one of whom had already won his case and was waiting to be released. We quickly mobilized the community to phone and email ICE, calling on them to release, and not transfer, Julio and Ankush. We also invited the community to donate to their commissary funds. Unfortunately, both were later transferred to the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Facility in Bakersfield, California. We later learned that ICE had violated its own Standard Operating Procedures for detention center closures by not allowing Julio and Ankush to submit release requests before being transferred.



Ricardo speaking at the United As One for One Vigil. October 30, 2021.



Ricardo and Fredy seeing each other for the first time after being released from Yuba County Jail at the United as One for One Vigil. October 31, 2021.



# Best Practices For In-Person Events

When we organized in-person events in and around Yuba County Jail, including protests, vigils, or celebrations, we took a number of steps to keep participants—some of whom were particularly vulnerable if they had contact with law enforcement—safe. For advocates considering in-person events, we recommend considering the following:

Contact the sheriff's office and local police department ahead of time to inform them that a group of community members and advocates plans to gather for a peaceful, First-Amendment-protected activity. Provide the date, time, and location of the event, how many people will attend, and the contact information for a designated "safety liaison." We chose to have the safety liaison be an attorney and asked them to bring their bar card and business cards. In the event there was trouble with local individuals or law enforcement, we hoped that delegating an attorney with knowledge of the First Amendment to speak to them would help to de-escalate the situation.

If applicable, inform event participants ahead of time that the event is not intended to be an act of civil disobedience, and that if law enforcement asks us to leave, the plan is to comply. Inform them that these are the choices advocates have made to minimize the risk of arrests of legally vulnerable community members who plan to attend.

If possible, engage your local National Lawyers Guild chapter and ask them if they can provide legal observers at your event. Legal observers are trained volunteers who wear distinctive lime green hats and monitor and document police conduct and arrests at protests. They are independent witnesses of police behavior at protests and do not participate as activists. They create documentation that can later be used in court or in public statements if law enforcement acts unlawfully.

**Building relationships with the broader community and collaborating with diverse organizations brought different voices into the fight and different pressure points for targets.** When the YLC decided to engage the Yuba County Board of Supervisors as a target, we realized that support from the local community was crucial—their voices were far more likely to be heard than a group of advocates from the Bay Area. After careful research on the Board, we thought the faith community could help create opportunities to meet with members of the Board regarding the contract.

In early 2022, we held a “brown bag” presentation and discussion with faith leaders from IM4HI to uplift the campaign and explore opportunities for collaboration. Faith leaders from various faiths heard directly from YLC member Carlos Saucedo about the terrible conditions at Yuba County Jail and the important role of faith leaders in the fight to terminate the contract. The brown bag was also an opportunity for faith leaders to ask questions about how the immigration system impacts our communities and to learn about detention abolition. As a result, faith leaders and the YLC agreed to co-author [two sign-on letters](#) to the Yuba County Board of Supervisors and Congressman John Garamendi, in whose district YCJ was located. The letters requested a meeting to discuss the termination of the ICE-Yuba contract. More than 200 faith leaders and organizations signed on to the letters, but only a handful were local to Yuba County. Unfortunately, the Board never responded to faith leaders’ and YLC’s request for a meeting. The Board remained an unmovable target, but the YLC remained intent on growing the support of the local community.

## Jonny: “I chose to use my body to protest”



Jonny was a leader at the Yuba County Jail and part of the Yuba 11. He participated in a hunger strike while there, describing that: “When you are detained, there are very limited options you have to raise your voice and to be heard. The only thing you have control over is your own body and what you choose to do with it . . . I chose to use my body to protest the terrible conditions at the jail.” Jonny built meaningful relationships with outside supporters throughout his time in ICE detention. The community was saddened when a judge denied Jonny’s release on bond, but celebrated when shortly after the hearing, Jonny was released—underscoring that ICE has the discretion to release people from detention at any time. At last, Jonny was liberated!

The day after he was released, Jonny went back to work as a landscape artist. His father thought he should rest, but Jonny was ready to make up for lost time. “When I was detained and my daughter’s mother mentioned she couldn’t afford to pay rent, my heart broke because there was nothing I could do to help them. Now I’m helping my family out. I’m doing everything I can to be an exemplary person.

# Communications Strategies

Our primary focus from a communications perspective focused on the “Five I’s” to increase campaign visibility and to keep our supporters informed, involved, interested and inspired.

## Increasing Campaign Visibility

We recognized the attention-grabbing nature of the contract between Yuba County Jail and ICE, given that it was the last contract between a county jail and ICE in California, and that the contract’s expiration date—2099—was set to outlive all of us. The contract’s unsettling longevity, the conditions inside the jail, and the \$8.66 million contract between ICE and Yuba County evoked a mix of anger and despair. At the same time, the small number of individuals detained at the jail by ICE instilled hope. It felt possible to end a contract that was set to outlive us all. It felt possible to end the last public contract between ICE and a county in California. We understood that effectively conveying these mixed sentiments of anger, despair, and hope to the public would **increase** our visibility, captivate the public’s interest in our campaign and compel them to take action.

One of the challenges we faced was uncertainty regarding our campaign’s duration. Had we known it would span multiple years, we might have opted to create dedicated social media channels specifically for the campaign. However, at the time, we did not know the campaign would ultimately last so long, so we chose to share campaign-related content through the social media channels of participating organizations. This collaborative approach allowed us to leverage existing networks and expand our reach, disseminating information and updates to a wider audience.

## Keeping Audiences Informed, Involved, Interested and Inspired

We understood that an **informed** audience possesses the potential to amplify a campaign’s message and actively engage others in its cause. To ensure our audiences remained well-informed, we diligently updated [our landing page](#), which served as a centralized hub for media stories, press releases, and public documents of interest, such as the contract amendments, letters from members of Congress, and reports on detention conditions related to our campaign.

We kept our community **involved** by encouraging individuals to sign up to receive updates and calls to action related to our campaign. Whenever one of the #Somos15 or #Yuba11 had a hearing, or if we ever had in-person actions



Supporter scans the QR code provided by the YCL at the Press Conference in front of the ICE building in San Francisco. December 15, 2021.

or calls to action for the community, we reached out to those who had registered through our form via email, and provided them with instructions on how to actively participate in the campaign. At in-person actions, we distributed small business-like cards with a QR code where people could learn more about our campaign and ways to support.

Social media played a vital role in sustaining our supporters' **interest** as we harnessed its power to facilitate conversations around the immigration system. In particular, we created an Instagram Live series named "[Cafeteando con los 11](#)," inspired by the term "cafetea," an informal gathering around coffee prevalent in many Spanish-speaking countries and within the Yuba County Jail. Through eleven Cafeteos, we brought together the Yuba 11, previously detained immigrants, their families, and community members, to share their firsthand experiences and shed light on how the immigration system has impacted their lives. Following the release of the Yuba 11, we transitioned to a new Instagram Live series titled "Libres y Cafeteando," delving into the post-release journey of these individuals and exploring the challenges and triumphs they encountered.

Lastly, we kept our supporters inspired by centering the humanity of the Yuba 11. We used asset framing<sup>20</sup> to highlight the positive before noting challenges, and shared details about the daily lives of people detained at the jail. This allowed us to help create meaningful connections between detained individuals and the wider community. Supporters recognized Leo as a skilled mechanic, and Luis as a savvy fisherman. They looked forward to going to Fredy's family taco truck and knew that Ricardo was an FC Barcelona fan. Knowing them inspired community members to support the fight to #FreeTheYuba11.

We were cognizant of the emotional toll on organizers, supporters, and especially impacted individuals when a campaign did not yield the expected results. To counter this, we celebrated every victory and—always with permission—shared pictures of the Yuba 11 when they were released back to their communities. Seeing people reunited with their families and again in community fueled our fight to push for the termination of the contract between ICE and Yuba County Jail.



Example of social media graphic for Cafeteando Con Los 11 Series

## A Lesson on Press(ure)

As the communications campaign evolved, we shifted our focus from reaching a broader press audience to nurturing meaningful relationships with select reporters. This strategic approach ensured there was documentation of our campaign evolution in the press, which in turn served not only to keep our community informed, but also to pressure congressional offices to take action.

An unexpected lesson we learned during our campaign was that the press played a pivotal role uncovering information that our targets were unwilling to disclose. A noteworthy instance was when we faced a prolonged period of uncertainty regarding the level of compensation ICE was providing to Yuba County Jail for detaining immigrants. We finally learned ICE was paying Yuba County Jail \$158.13 per bed for a 150-bed guaranteed minimum from an article in the Appeal Democrat,<sup>21</sup> when a spokesperson from the Yuba County Sheriff provided this information to the reporter. This finding underscored the significance of press involvement in unearthing vital information essential to our campaign.

## Legal/Organizing Partnerships

We used several legal strategies to draw public attention to the contract and—as much as possible—to make it embarrassing and onerous for Yuba County and ICE to continue the contract. Because there was no single legal strategy that could do away with the contract at once, we leveraged legal hooks wherever we could to build a public record about the inhumane conditions inside YCJ and signal to county leadership that outside advocates were paying attention. We hoped that Yuba County would conclude that the continuation of the ICE contract was not worth the negative publicity and time involved in responding to our legal inquiries. In the end, Yuba County leadership did not initiate the termination of the ICE detention contract. However, the work we did was not in vain—the legal strategies we pursued exposed the deplorable conditions at YCJ, helped create a factual record about the enormous waste of federal taxpayer dollars involved in paying for the IGSA, and kept community members as safe as possible when we planned in-person events located in the generally more conservative community around Yuba County Jail, including rallies, vigils, and celebrations (see “Best Practices For In Person Events” section, page 25). Our key legal strategies included the following:

1. **Seeking freedom: Habeas petitions, bond applications, and demonstrations of community support**

For each of the Yuba 11, we identified and reached out to their immigration attorneys to formulate a set of strategies for securing their physical freedom. We invited the immigration attorneys to our coalition meetings to learn about the procedural posture of each detained person’s immigration case and whether the person was eligible to file a habeas petition or bond application to seek freedom from detention. For individuals who needed it, we looked for attorneys to provide pro bono habeas representation.

Whenever there was a habeas or bond hearing, we organized “pack the court” opportunities for community members to show up—in-person or virtually—to support the detained individual and to show the court how much community support the person had. During the virtual “pack the courts,” dozens of people joined a Zoom call that was connected to the audio feed from the court. One point person was responsible for communicating to the attorney in the courtroom how many community members were virtually present, so the attorney could communicate that number to the habeas or bond judge and convey how much support the detained person would have if released to the community. These “pack the courts” were critical opportunities for detained individuals to feel connected to and supported by people outside detention walls. When a hearing resulted in an order for release, the detained individual and community could celebrate together. When a hearing resulted in a denial of release, the community was there to comfort the person and help bear the sorrow and disappointment of the outcome, helping the detained person feel less isolated and communicating that we would continue to fight for their release.

The “pack the courts” were also opportunities for the YLC to introduce members of the public to the life stories of the wonderful people detained in the jail and educate them about the unnecessary injustices of the immigration legal system, especially detention. When judges denied people release, members of the public witnessed the arbitrary nature of the immigration courts and the unnecessary and heartbreaking nature of detention. These events helped galvanize the public to continue caring about and fighting for immigration justice.



**Leonel, part of the Yuba 11 after learning he had been granted bond with supporters who attended his bond hearing in-person.**



**Screenshot of supporters that attended Leo's bond hearing virtually.**

## 2. Demand letter to Yuba County officials

In December 2021, we sent a legal demand letter<sup>22</sup> to the Yuba County Sheriff's Office (which operated YCJ) and the Yuba County Board of Supervisors (which had legal authority over YCJ). The letter noted that the jail's longstanding practice of "co-mingling" persons detained civilly by ICE with those detained for criminal purposes by the county violated California law. Consistent with the goal of our overall advocacy, which was to end the contract between Yuba County and ICE, the letter urged the county to avoid legal liability by ending its practice of detaining people for federal immigration purposes.

The goals of the letter were several: first, to create a comprehensive public record of the dehumanizing conditions of confinement people experienced at the jail; second, to put Yuba County on notice that outside advocates were aware that YCJ's policies had violated California law and that those violations exposed the county to potential legal liability; and third, to introduce to the county the idea that they could choose to terminate the contract to avoid future legal liability.

We did not receive a response to this letter from either the sheriff or the county. However, by making our letter [publicly accessible](#), we were able to share it with advocates, journalists, community

## Juvenal: "As if I were family"



Respectfully addressed as "Don Juve," Juvenal was the eldest member of the Yuba 11, and one of the members who spent the longest period of time in ICE detention. Detained at the YCJ for more than three years,

Juvenal repeatedly connected with others in detention, organizers, and his legal team as he participated in several collaborative projects. For example, he called on ICE to meet the 10 demands of the Somos 15 in a video shared through social media, ["Free the Yuba 15"](#) and joined Carlos Saucedo and Edwin Carmona-Cruz from the Yuba Liberation Coalition for a [Cafeteo on Instagram](#) in May 2021.

Juvenal developed strong relationships with organizers from the Yuba Liberation Coalition, and had an especially close bond with his attorney, [Valerie Zukin](#), who initially worked with the California Collaborative for Immigrant Justice and later with the Immigrant Legal Resource Center. Juvenal was Valerie's last pro bono client before she passed away after a long battle with cancer. Juvenal described how it was "very painful" to lose her, and was honored to speak at a virtual memorial for Valerie: "She was such a good person—she treated me as if I were family."

The YLC was saddened when Juvenal was deported in 2021, but Don Juve was at peace knowing that he had such strong community support. As he shared, "I'm grateful for the friendships I made in detention." After returning to Mexico, Juvenal was relieved that "everything did not fall apart" in the ways that he feared it might: "I'm going to be OK."

**Legal strategies can amplify advocacy avenues, making your work more powerful than the sum of its parts.**

members, and other concerned citizens. We also sent a copy of the letter to officials in the Biden Administration's ICE headquarters. We hoped that the letter would help them understand that YCJ was an unacceptable facility for civil immigration detention and would help persuade them to terminate the agreement themselves.

### **3. Records requests under the Public Records Act**

After a series of conversations with advocates who had succeeded in shutting down ICE facilities at other site fights, we decided to try our luck at exposing misconduct, a breach of contract, or other wrongdoing that might encourage public officials to terminate the contract. To that end, we sent a California Public Records Act (PRA) request to the Yuba County Sheriff's Office seeking records of communications between the office and ICE, and another PRA request to the Yuba County Board of Supervisors seeking the same. Counsel for Yuba County largely ignored our PRA requests, except for sending us a copy of all iterations of the IGSA with ICE from January 1, 2013 to the present. These documents, which we uploaded online for public access, contained the then-current version of the ICE IGSA, which, to our knowledge, had not yet been available to the public. That document confirmed that on March 28, 2020, Yuba County and ICE modified the existing contract to create, for the first time, a guaranteed minimum of 150 beds, at \$158.13 per bed per day. Until that point, our only source for these figures had been the Yuba County Sheriff's spokesperson's quote in the Appeal Democrat. Using these figures, we calculated that the contract guaranteed Yuba County almost \$24,000 per day, or over \$8.66 million per year—even if, as was sometimes the case, there were zero individuals detained for ICE at YCJ. This document alone was extremely helpful to our advocacy because it showed how shockingly wasteful the IGSA's continued existence was.

If ICE had not terminated the IGSA, we were planning to bring a PRA lawsuit against Yuba County. Such a lawsuit would have sought to not only obtain the records we were entitled to under the law, but to bring further negative publicity to the county's ICE detention contract and show the county that the contract was more trouble than it was worth.

As with all legal strategies, these are most effective when used in combination with other community-based and public-facing advocacy work. But at their best, legal strategies can amplify your other chosen advocacy avenues, ultimately making your work more powerful than the sum of its parts.



# Federal Advocacy Strategies

We knew that ICE had the power to terminate the IGSA with Yuba County at any time. The Biden administration showed some early willingness to close certain ICE detention centers around the country, and we sought to place Yuba County Jail on their radar as a facility they should consider closing. While the Biden administration has been generally disappointing on issues related to immigrants' rights and immigration detention, we nevertheless believed they might be a more moveable target for advocacy than the Republican-voting, conservative local officials in Yuba County.

Our federal advocacy strategy had two parts. The first part was to push Congress to invoke its oversight powers over ICE and its detention facilities. While Congress could not directly terminate the IGSA itself, we hoped that some members of Congress would be willing to urge DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to terminate the detention contract with Yuba County. The second part was to advocate directly with Biden administration officials working in ICE's headquarters in Washington D.C. We knew that at least some of those officials were likely in charge of deciding which ICE detention contracts to terminate next, and we wanted them to know that Yuba County Jail should be on that list.

## 1. Congressional facing advocacy

In summer and fall 2021, we worked with every member of the Yuba 11 who remained detained in ICE custody to analyze which members of Congress could be targets for our advocacy. We identified the following members for outreach:

- Representative Zoe Lofgren, for whom immigrants' rights was a clear priority issue, and who was serving as Chair of the House Judiciary Immigration and Citizenship Subcommittee.
- Representative John Garamendi, in whose district Yuba County Jail was located.
- Representatives Lou Correa, Jackie Speier, and Jimmy Panetta, who represented the districts from which the remaining detained men came and to which they intended to return.

In coordination with each detained individual's family members, we reached out to their representatives' constituent services offices and requested meetings to brief them on the terrible conditions of confinement at Yuba County Jail and the unnecessary cruelty of immigration detention. All but one of the representatives responded to our outreach and met with us at least once.

To prepare for each meeting, we began by identifying the people who would attend and their roles. We prioritized scheduling the meetings for times that currently and formerly detained individuals could attend and participate substantively. We also invited their family members to attend. We assigned each person a role (such as facilitator or notetaker) and made sure every participant with a speaking role had a specific topic they were responsible for speaking about (such as providing a quick primer about the Yuba-ICE IGSA, or providing testimony about the awful conditions of confinement in the jail). We brainstormed what we could ask the congressional office to do to advance our issue and drafted an agenda designed around achieving those goals. We always made sure to hold a “practice run” the day or two before the actual meeting, so everyone knew what to expect and had a chance to practice. This was especially important for participants who were new to the idea of lobbying their representatives.

As a result of our meetings with congressional offices, the California congressional delegation, led by Representatives Lofgren and Correa, sent DHS Secretary Mayorkas a letter<sup>23</sup> urging him to terminate ICE’s contracts with Yuba county Jail, Otay Mesa Detention Center, and Adelanto ICE Processing Center.<sup>24</sup> The letter not only ensured the Yuba IGSA would be on the Biden administration’s radar, but was also an effective way to educate journalists and the public about the Yuba-ICE contract.

## **2. Advocacy to ICE headquarters in Washington, D.C.**

We chose to focus some of our advocacy on ICE officials headquartered in Washington, D.C. We knew that any decision by ICE to terminate the contract would have to come from higher-up officials there, not local ICE personnel in the Bay Area. During his campaign, President Biden promised he would close some ICE detention facilities. We hoped that if he kept his promise, Yuba County Jail would be among the facilities chosen for closure.

We had some contacts within ICE’s D.C. headquarters because when President Biden’s administration began, some of his new personnel, including within DHS, were people who previously had worked as advocates in the immigrants’ rights space. This will likely be the case for any new Democratic administration that assumes power. We were able to take advantage of some of those pre-existing relationships to reach out to those likely allies and get the Yuba-ICE contract on their radar.

Most of this outreach simply meant we emailed our contacts when there was news to share, such as a new in-depth article about YCJ, an investigation, or new legal advocacy by us. We also reached out when the population of

people detained by ICE at YCJ reached zero in October 2021. We rarely received a response, but we continued to write when we felt there was something important they should know. We wanted the officials to know that the problems at YCJ weren't going away, and we expected them to do something about it.

Federal administrative advocacy can be effective in a Democratic administration. However, even in the best case scenario, you won't necessarily know whether your advocacy is working until—all of a sudden—it does. Set your expectations accordingly. Agencies (and their employees) are tight-lipped. They do not want to overpromise, and as a result, they tend to err on the side of not giving anything away. Don't be discouraged by their silent treatment. Just keep focused on your strategy. They may ignore you for months, and then email you all of a sudden asking for a phone call. You never know when your issue will become the one the administration wants to focus on. But by following the tips in the following pages, you can do your best to ensure you are in the conversation when it happens.

# Best Practices When Briefing Congressional Offices

- **Have a clear goal, or “ask,”.** Before you enter the meeting, know the key points you must convey, and exactly what you plan to ask the member of Congress to do. You may have as little as 15 or 30 minutes for your meeting. Knowing your clear goals ensures you do not waste the opportunity.
  - Prepare a menu of options, including fall back options. As much as we want to have congressional offices do exactly what we need them to do, we must situate our “asks” in the context of the immigration politics of the moment. This doesn’t mean you can’t make a bold “ask,” but you should be prepared in case the office is not ready to accept your first choice. Set expectations internally and plan for various scenarios.
  - When an issue has impacted numerous ICE detention facilities across the state and it has attracted media coverage, one of your “asks” should be to have a member of Congress lead a letter on behalf of your state’s congressional delegation to the President, the DHS Secretary, or another leader.
- **Center lived experiences.** Include directly impacted individuals so they can share their stories with members of Congress. Depending on the situation, you can also include 1–2 family members. Phone access for detained individuals varies across facilities, but to the extent possible, include detained individuals in your briefings.
- **Plan your meeting:**
  - Prepare an agenda, assign agenda items to participants, and practice going through the meeting beforehand.
  - Secure interpretation before the meeting, if needed.
  - Designate one notetaker who will have no speaking role in the meeting.
  - Be clear, concise, and direct. This will help

persuade a member of Congress that your issue deserves priority in their agenda.

- **Document, document, document.** We know that immigration detention is deadly and unnecessary, but members of Congress may not know that. It is crucial that everything that happens inside detention is documented comprehensively so advocates can organize the information to drive advocacy with congressional offices. For example:
  - Turn information from detained individuals into easy-to-digest one-pagers.
  - With the consent of people detained inside, consider drafting op-eds, blog posts, testimonials, or other documents that can be disseminated widely.
  - Use media and social media to get the attention of congressional offices.
- **Try to get concrete commitments, and follow up in writing afterward.** It can feel uncomfortable at first, but getting concrete commitments is critical to ensuring that all participants leave the meeting with a mutual understanding of who will do what, and by when. After the meeting, thank the staff members in writing, and repeat your understanding of the next steps coming out of the meeting. If you do not hear back by the deadlines you have agreed to, you can use that as a reason to follow up with them.
- **Leverage media to your advantage.** Before or during your outreach, it is important to place a story about your issue in the media, or reach out to a reporter who has worked on your issue before. Media attention creates momentum and creates a sense of urgency, all of which will help persuade a member of Congress to get involved. To get media interest in your issue, ask yourself:
  - What is “newsworthy” about my issue? What is new, interesting, urgent, or timely?
  - What are media outlets and influencers saying about the issue?
  - What do the comments say? This will help you create messaging that is responsive to what is being said online.



A man with a beard and sunglasses is speaking into a megaphone at an outdoor event. He is wearing a black t-shirt and light blue shorts. In the background, there are trees and other people, some holding signs. The scene is outdoors on a grassy area.

# Best Practices When Doing Advocacy With D.C. Officials

If you are conducting your own advocacy with D.C. officials, here are some helpful tips:

- **Keep your emails concise and direct.** Assume your reader is busy and will skim.
- Do not pepper your contacts with emails. Reach out with updates every 1–2 months, at most.
- **Updates can include anything noteworthy that helps push your agenda forward**—for instance, demand letters, lawsuits, news articles, or factual revelations that change the political calculus surrounding your issue. The goal is to (politely) remind the officials that your issue has not gone away, that you are still waiting for them to do something meaningful to advance your goals, and that you will not go away until they have done something.
- **Think about the issue from their point of view.** Why should they help you? How will the federal government benefit by helping you? It might be as simple as positive publicity for the administration. Whatever it is, you need to make sure you are understanding and being responsive to their incentives.
- **Do not expect a substantive reply.** Federal government officials' emails are subject to Freedom of Information Act disclosures and they are generally careful about what they put into externally facing emails. If they want to talk more candidly, they will ask for a phone call. Likewise, assume that everything you send them could be revealed publicly one day, and redact documents or anonymize information as necessary to protect the privacy of detained people and their loved ones.

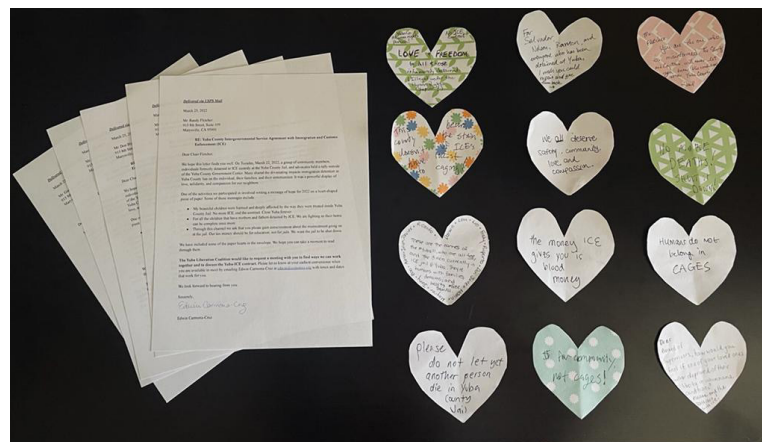
# Local Advocacy Strategies

Our approach to local advocacy centered around the Board of Supervisors, since the Board could proactively make the decision to end their contract with ICE. We started by power mapping and learning everything we could about the Supervisors to understand their priorities and how they might respond to a call to end the contract. This process was difficult due to our lack of local contacts that could provide direct knowledge on the Supervisors, so at first our research was mostly limited to internet searches.

The next step was to immerse ourselves into local politics by regularly attending Board meetings. A key part of attending the Board meetings was observing the public comment portion to better understand local issues from the perspective of Yuba County residents and to learn more about the priorities of the Supervisors by seeing how they responded, and what issues they focused on.

While we continued to learn more about Yuba County through this method, members of the coalition leveraged their networks and we were put into contact with a Supervisor from the neighboring Yolo county who was both sympathetic to our cause and personally knew members of the Board. This meeting provided great insight, and we learned more about regional politics and priorities. We learned from all of this that, based on our observations and from the perspective of the Yolo county supervisor we consulted with, it was unlikely that the Board would be willing to seriously consider terminating the contract. Nevertheless, we felt it was worth giving the Board of Supervisors a chance to hear us out.

**A key part of attending the Board meetings was observing the public comment portion to better understand local issues from the perspective of Yuba County residents and to learn more about the priorities of the Supervisors.**



**Letter from the Yuba Liberation Coalition & notes from the community sent to the Yuba County Board of Supervisors asking them to terminate their contract with ICE**

After directly targeting communications to the Board of Supervisors through letters and in-person actions, we realized that members of the Board were not receptive to our calls to end the contract. Perhaps this represented an unwillingness to lose a contract worth millions to the county, the Board's own political leanings and views on immigrants, or both. Either way, upon confirming that the Board was not open to discussing the issue with us, we shifted our local strategy to focus on building a base of supportive Yuba County residents. This was done both to involve the local community and based on our observations from Board Meetings that led us to believe the Board would likely be more receptive to hearing directly from their constituents on the matter.



**YLC members giving a presentation on the fight to end the Yuba-ICE contract to UC Davis law students.**

To connect with Yuba County residents, we employed a deep canvassing strategy in collaboration with the UC Davis School of Law Immigration Law Clinic. Collaborating with UC Davis in this project was invaluable given the relative proximity of the campus to Yuba County, and the local knowledge clinical professors at this campus have due to their legal work spanning across Northern California.

Our coalition decided to pursue deep canvassing after learning more about the California Immigrant Policy Center's successful deep canvassing campaign<sup>25</sup>. Deep canvassing proved to be an innovative and powerful approach to traditional canvassing methods.

The goals of our deep canvassing campaign were to assess whether Yuba County residents were aware of the ICE detention contract, whether or not they were in support of it, and to recruit residents to join the call to end it. In crafting this campaign, we had to think creatively about how best to connect with Yuba County residents about immigration detention, which can often be a polarizing topic because it relates both to the complex immigration system in the United States, and to individuals who have interacted with the criminal legal system. To open our conversations, we asked residents to tell us about issues they had identified in their own community, what their priorities were, and what they believed could and should be improved. This allowed us to connect with individuals on what they care about, and then later connect that to the county's involvement with ICE. Next, we delved into conversation questions, connecting on shared immigration experiences. Our main question asked residents to reflect on a time they had been unfairly judged. This particular question went through a lot of brainstorming and many iterations, but



we landed on this question to encourage residents to connect to how immigrants in immigration detention are being unfairly judged simply because of where they happened to be born.

Our deep canvassing campaign was still in its early stages when we received the news that the contract was set to be terminated. However, the process up to that point was nonetheless deeply insightful, allowing us to think about our messaging strategies and tactics and what would appeal to a broader audience, including those who may not agree with us at first.

The important lesson we learned in our community advocacy strategy—as well as in all strategies we employed throughout the campaign—was that there is no “one size fits all” approach. For instance, while other site fights may have had success appealing directly to their local Board of Supervisors, in our case, we discovered that this was not a viable path in Yuba County. Thus, we thought creatively to pivot and come up with other avenues of appealing to our targets, in combination with all the other strategies we describe above. We realized that it is challenging to know beforehand what will ultimately work—we chose to try everything we thought could work, do our best, and see what might happen. We carried out the work by centering the voices, priorities, and needs of directly impacted individuals and their families. Above all, their leadership, trust, and stories were essential to the success of this campaign and the collective victory of ending the ICE contract at the Yuba County Jail.

**The important lesson we learned in our community advocacy strategy—as well as in all strategies we employed throughout the campaign—was that there is no “one size fits all” approach.**



YLC members celebrating the end of the contract between Yuba County Jail and ICE, March 19, 2023.



Supporters at the Yuba-ICE Contract Termination Celebration, March 19, 2023.

## Conclusion: “No More Cages / No Más Jaulas”



Supporters making art from stencils provided by the YLC at the Yuba-ICE Contract Termination Celebration, March 19, 2023.

“It is so important to create connections between advocates and people on the outside. People are not alone. . . . We created a network with leaders inside and advocacy groups on the outside. We built a bridge, a bridge that brings hope.”

Carlos Saucedo, YLC member, formerly detained at YCJ

From the beginning, efforts to end the contract at the Yuba County Jail depended on strong relationships between people inside and outside of detention. As Carlos describes—and as the core strategies of this campaign have shown—building bridges is at the center of effective organizing to end immigration detention. Carlos and others who were detained at the YCJ have experienced firsthand the power of community, and know how people can enact change when they come together and take action collectively.

On March 19, 2023, we gathered in Marysville with over 70 community members to celebrate the termination of the ICE contract and to honor those who did not survive Yuba County Jail or who were deported. It was so powerful to celebrate such an incredible victory on the steps of the jail with some of the people who had been previously detained there. As Serafin, a leader formerly detained at Mesa Verde, stated, the end of the Yuba-ICE contract was “the culmination of what the people can accomplish when we come together and fight for a cause. When the law and government officials fail us, we got us. To see this happen is a testament to the collective power we have.”

Still, even as we celebrated the end of the ICE contract with the Yuba County Jail, immigrants detained in California’s Central Valley, at Golden State Annex (GSA) and Mesa Verde, were on the 30th day of a hunger strike for their collective release. Most of the YLC member organizations have also been deeply involved in the fight to shut down both of these facilities and when YCJ was repopulated, we began connecting individuals at Yuba County Jail with detained leaders at GSA and Mesa Verde to build solidarity across facilities. Those detained at YCJ felt empowered and less isolated when they started connecting with the others and learning about their organizing efforts like the labor strike. When we shared with leaders at Mesa Verde and GSA that the YCJ contract would end in February 2023, it gave them hope and strength going into the hunger strike, which lasted 35 days.

Our fight to abolish detention in California continues in the Central Valley and elsewhere with the lessons learned from the Yuba fight. Today, the movement to end immigration detention is larger and stronger than ever, bringing together people who have been harmed by detention and those following their lead.

To conclude, our advice for other communities working to end ICE contracts or shut down facilities is:

- Build bridges and prioritize relationships with those directly affected, their families, and allies.
- Organize, do not just mobilize. Make space for those directly impacted to learn, lead and develop others who have also been harmed by detention and the immigration system. Support leadership development that will grow and strengthen the movement.
- Build a base of local supporters. Their voices and actions are more likely to be heard than those of advocates who may not live in the community where the detention center resides.
- Make a strategy chart, and re-strategize when it is not working. Know your targets well (what they care about, what they are afraid of, what motivates them, who moves them, etc.) and engage in power mapping<sup>26</sup> to save time and energy.
- Collaborate with movement lawyers who will fight not only to release individuals but will be ready to become ICE and private prison companies' worst nightmare. At the same time, remember that legal strategy alone is not sufficient.

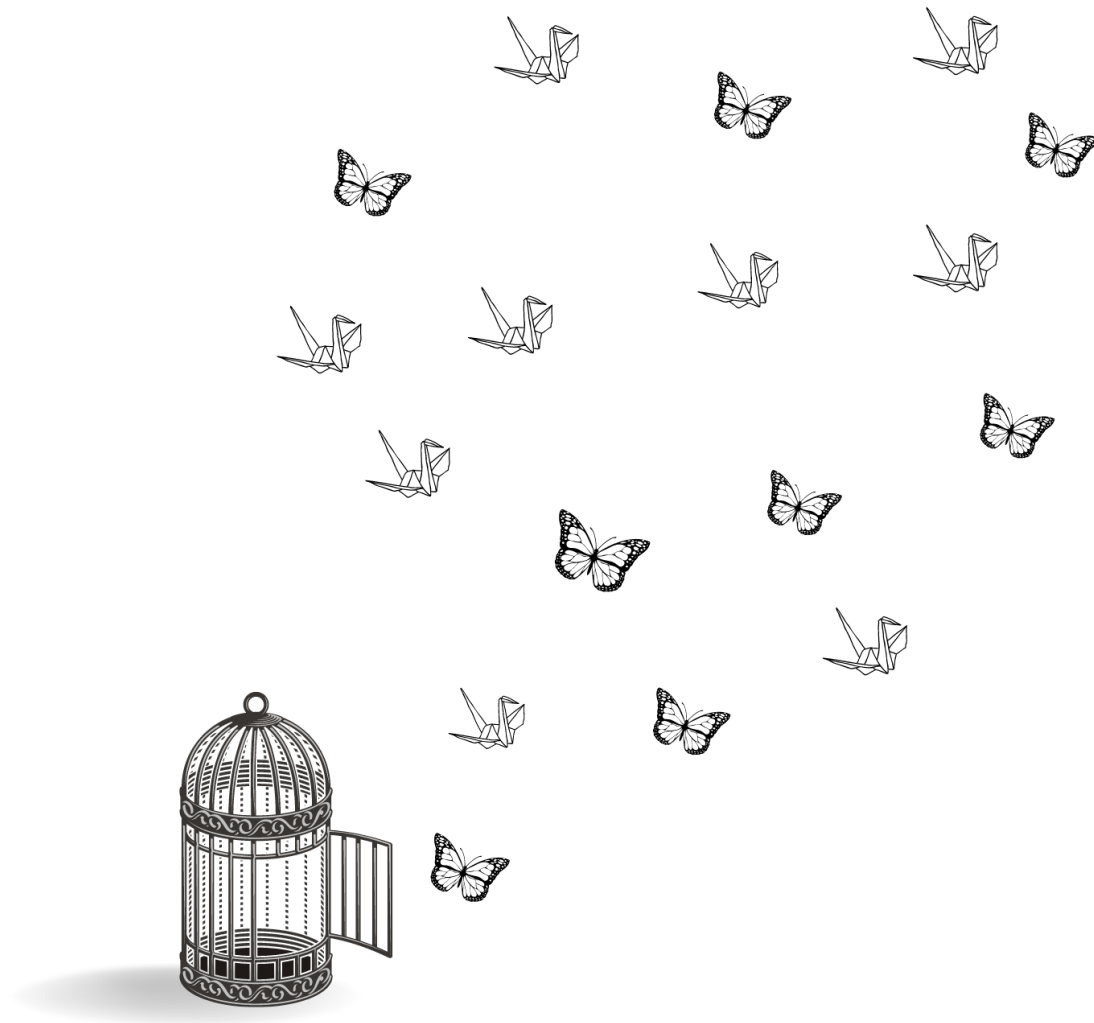
## ¡La Lucha Sigue!

Less-well-resourced and more rural communities, such as Bakersfield and McFarland where the Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center and Golden State Annex are respectively located, may rely on carceral economies to balance their budgets but that do not necessarily meet the true needs of their residents. The Dignity Not Detention Coalition, a statewide group based in California working to abolish detention, is working on an initiative, known as [HEAL](#), that aims to transition such municipalities from their dependence on ICE detention permits or contracts through California's budget process. The HEAL proposal "requests \$15 million to incentivize local governments to end their permits for ICE detention centers in exchange for workforce development funds. These funds will allow cities to transition from their reliance on carceral economies to long-term sustainable, healthy jobs for their community." If you're a California resident, contact your state representatives to urge them to support the HEAL proposal.

At times, it feels surreal that our campaign to terminate the last contract between ICE and a California county jail succeeded—a contract that was supposed to end in 2099. Carlos describes how coalitional organizing “shows people in detention that they are not alone, that the community believes in them . . . that they have support of people on the outside, and they can work together.” In this brief, we have shared how connection, collective action, community building, and collaboration ended the ICE contract at the Yuba County Jail. We hope that this reflection on our experiences will be helpful as local communities, in California and across the country, continue to come together to end immigration detention.

As we expressed at our celebration on the steps of the Yuba County Jail:

**“May the joy of one detention center closure  
fuel the next fight for liberation.”**



# Celebration Album

Photos from our Yuba-ICE Contract Termination Celebration where we celebrated the end of immigrant detention in Northern California, commemorated those harmed by the jail, and uplifted the demands of those still impacted by immigrant detention.



The event started with a Taiko performance by Bakuatsu Taiko Dan, led by Gregory Wada (on the right). In his words, “Taiko in the United States sings the memory of the Japanese American Incarceration and Asian American Movement. I hope the sound of these drums will be heard and touch hearts in places where liberation is needed. The text on this drum reads, shishiku, ‘lion’s roar’, taken from a verse of the Buddhist gatha “Juseige,” which expresses the need to work for the liberation of others.”



Faith leaders Reverend Deb (picture on the left) and Reverend Allison (right) were long-time supporters of the fight to end the contract between YCJ and ICE. They led community members through a moment of silence for those who have lost their lives to immigrant detention.



Left to right: Jun Hamamoto, who teaches origami at San Quentin State Prison and her student, Lam Hong Le, previously detained at the YCJ; Joshua Kaizuka, from the Japanese American Citizens League, Florin Chapter; and Dr. Rhonda Rios Kravitz from Alianza and Sacramento Immigration Coalition, each played an important role in fighting to close Yuba as a detention center before the YLC and in organizing the Yuba Closure Celebration.



Participants heard testimonies from Lam Hong Le, (left), and Carlos Saucedo (through the phone), both previously detained at the jail. Mariana Mejía (center) held up the megaphone to the speaker so participants could hear Carlo's testimony better. Mr. Vang (right) whose family member, Vong Yang, died at the jail while incarcerated, also gave testimony, highlighting the importance of shutting down Yuba County Jail for good.



Left to right: Yuba Liberation Coalition members Esperanza Cuautle, Laura Duarte Bateman, and Kristen Perez. Esperanza spoke about the Free The Yuba 11, Kristen spoke about the Yuba Liberation Coalition, and Laura mc'ed the event.



At the end of the celebration we invited community members to use our stencils that read "No more cages" & "No más jaulas" to create art, and also had an origami station where people could make tsurus and butterflies, two figures that represent migration and freedom.

A special thank you to Brooke Anderson (@movementphotographer), who captured many of our events with her camera, including the Yuba Closure Celebration.

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