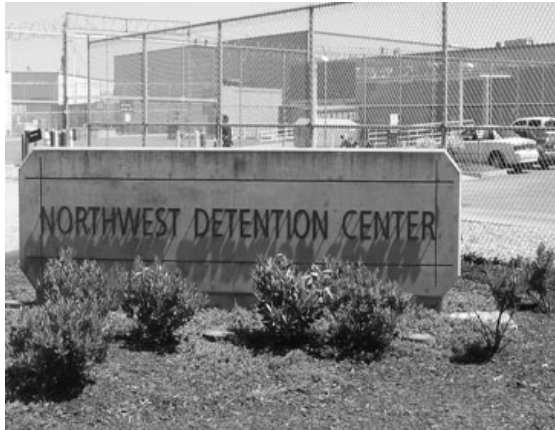


What is the Northwest Detention Center?



Located in Tacoma, Washington, the Northwest Detention Center is an immigration prison facility privately owned by the corporation, Geo Group. It is capable of holding up to 1,061 occupants (There is a proposal now before the Tacoma City Council to increase the facility to hold 1500 inmates). Individuals are detained here while awaiting hearings on immigration-related charges and/or deportation.

Who are the detainees?

The detention center's population is a mixture of both U.S. and non-U.S. citizens awaiting citizenship verification and potential deportation. Inmates face charges in the civil courts rather than criminal as they are awaiting citizenship verification. If they don't have it, the only illegal act they have committed is being in the country—any additional charges they face do not predicate their expulsion. Many detainees also enter federal custody after they're arrested during raids or through the Criminal Alien Program, in which federal officials take custody of illegal immigrants incarcerated in local or state jails or prisons.

What are the living conditions like?

Living conditions in the Detention Center are difficult. In a comprehensive report released by OneAmerica detailing many human rights violations, the list included lack of adequate and nutritional food (food can be purchased), inadequate mental health treatment, lack of a proper emergency medical response and dismal living quarters that provide no privacy. Furthermore, inmates are subjected to various forms of abuse from officers and guards at the facility, including sexual harassment, strip searches, and verbal/physical abuse. All these conditions are aggravated by the lack of support for dealing with language barriers.

Where do detainees go afterwards?

By in large, detainees can stay at the Center anywhere from two-three days to two-three years. During this time, their hearing to determine citizenship status is held in a court located inside the Detention Center. Judges presiding in the court are appointed by The Executive Office of Immigration and Review (EOIR). **Unlike traditional judicial judges, these "immigration judges" are not subject to the same regulations as their constitutional counterparts.** Thus, due process, a cornerstone of the US justice system, is not maintained in these courts.

Occasionally, detainees are released back into the public due to verification of citizenship, but most are deported to their country of origin. In some cases, the country

of origin is considered too dangerous and also won't accept incoming deportees. Somalia, Vietnam and Cuba are examples. In those cases, inmates are then released under an Order of Supervision, with the stipulation that they are subject to immediate deportation at any given moment.

How did the Northwest Detention Center come to exist?

According to Criminal Justice Professor Daniel Okada, the "interest in privatization [of prisons] originated with the Reagan administration's agenda to pass along many government responsibilities to the private sector." This international trend set the stage for a private firm, the Correctional Services Corporation (CSC) to take over operating the Seattle Detention Center owned at the time by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

At the end of 2000, the privatized prison system was suffering financially (Source: CorpWatch, www.corpwatch.org), due to an inability of corporations that ran private prisons to keep their facilities filled. However after 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security began raiding immigrant communities picking up anyone without proper documentation and sending them to privately-owned detention facilities. The Seattle Detention facility could not accommodate the rising inmate population, leading to a demand for detention center expansion. In 2004, CSC with help from officials on the Tacoma City Council moved the facility to the Tacoma Tideflats, a former Superfund cleanup site.

The Geo Group, who now owns the Detention Center and which is today completely privatized, bought The Detention Center from CSC in 2004. Geo Group is an international corporation that owns over 67 prison facilities world-wide. It has been cited for numerous violations in many states.