

An Examination of the Otay Mesa Detention Center

Introduction

The Otay Mesa Detention Center, situated in San Diego, California, serves as a significant detention facility within the United States. This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the center, encompassing its operational framework, historical evolution, and the conditions reported within its premises. By examining its management structure, the demographics of its detainee population, visitation protocols, and reported incidents, this analysis seeks to offer a detailed understanding of this key facility in the context of federal detention operations. The involvement of multiple federal agencies and a private contractor in the operation of the center underscores the complexity of its organizational structure and necessitates a thorough examination of their respective roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, its strategic location on the US-Mexico border imbues the facility with additional significance, potentially shaping the characteristics of the individuals it houses and the level of public and political attention it garners ¹.

Overview and Key Facts

Location and Setting

The Otay Mesa Detention Center is located in the Otay Mesa area of San Diego, California ¹. Its geographical setting places it in the foothills of the San Ysidro Mountains, offering a view overlooking the US-Mexico border ¹. This facility is part of a larger network of law enforcement entities in the vicinity, which includes the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, the George Bailey Detention Facility, the East Mesa Reentry Facility, the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility, and a multi-jurisdictional law enforcement firearms training complex utilized by agencies such as the FBI and Customs Service ¹. The convergence of these various law enforcement and correctional facilities in a single area suggests a highly concentrated zone of detention and law enforcement infrastructure. This clustering could potentially lead to enhanced logistical coordination among the agencies. However, it also prompts consideration of the broader impact on the local community, including potential environmental effects and the overall social dynamics of the region ¹.

Operational Purpose

The Otay Mesa Detention Center functions as a federal correctional institution with a minimum to medium security classification, primarily housing adult male inmates ¹. Its operations are conducted through a contractual agreement between CoreCivic, a private correctional services corporation, and both the United States Marshals Service

and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) ¹. ICE utilizes the facility to detain individuals who are undergoing immigration enforcement proceedings ². The core mission of ICE in this context involves the identification, apprehension, detention, and subsequent removal of non-citizens who are deemed removable from the United States ². The agency's focus is directed towards individuals considered to pose the most significant threats to national security, public safety, or the security of the nation's borders ². In addition to immigration detainees, the facility also houses individuals classified as criminal detainees, which includes those who have been convicted of crimes and those awaiting trial or sentencing (remand) ⁴. This dual function of detaining both immigration law violators and individuals involved in the criminal justice system indicates a diverse detainee population within the facility. This diversity may present complexities in terms of management, requiring tailored approaches to security, housing, and the provision of necessary services that align with the distinct legal statuses and needs of these different groups ⁴.

Capacity

The stated capacity of the Otay Mesa Detention Center varies across different sources. While some indicate a capacity of 1040 individuals ¹, others report a figure of 750 ⁶. An inspection report from 2022 noted an operational capacity (the specific number of beds was not provided) and stated that the facility housed 1339 detainees, encompassing both ICE detainees (male and female of all classification levels) and male and female inmates under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Marshal Service, on the first day of the inspection ⁴. Furthermore, a 2020 report by Disability Rights California cited a capacity of 1482 individuals aged 18 and older ⁷. These discrepancies in the reported capacity figures suggest that the facility's official or actual capacity may have fluctuated over time. These variations could be attributed to factors such as facility expansions, renovations, or adjustments in operational needs in response to changing demands from the contracting agencies. Therefore, when considering the size and potential for overcrowding at the facility, it is essential to take into account the date and source of the capacity information ⁴.

Ownership and Management

Ownership

The Otay Mesa Detention Center has been under the ownership of CoreCivic, a private, for-profit correctional services corporation, since 2015 ⁵. The company's involvement in the Otay Mesa area dates back to 1997 when, under its former name Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), it secured a lease agreement with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department ⁸. This initial agreement enabled the company to

establish the first immigration detention facility in San Diego County on land leased from the county, situated in proximity to the George Bailey Detention Facility and the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility⁸. Following the expiration of this lease, CoreCivic transitioned to privately owned property. In 2010, the company acquired approximately 40 acres of land in Otay Mesa for \$10.3 million⁸. On this newly purchased land, CoreCivic constructed a new detention facility, which commenced operations in 2015⁵. This shift from a leasing arrangement with a public entity to owning private property and directly contracting with ICE has significant implications for the level of oversight and control exerted by state governmental bodies over the facility's operations and potential for expansion⁸. Private ownership allows CoreCivic greater autonomy in its contractual relationships with federal agencies, potentially bypassing some local regulations or restrictions that might apply to facilities located on publicly owned land.

Management

The management of the Otay Mesa Detention Center is primarily handled by CoreCivic through contractual agreements with both ICE and the US Marshals Service¹. The Senior Warden of the facility, Christopher J. LaRose, was appointed to this role in July 2019⁵. ICE, through its Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) division, provides oversight for detention facilities that are managed by private contractors⁹. The operational standards for the Otay Mesa Detention Center are governed by an intergovernmental service agreement between ICE and the facility, which mandates compliance with the 2011 Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS)⁹. These standards establish a framework for ensuring consistent conditions of detention, program operations, and management expectations within ICE's detention system. They encompass various aspects of facility operations, including environmental health and safety, sanitation, security protocols, detainee search procedures, segregation practices, and disciplinary systems⁹. While these standards aim to ensure a baseline level of care and operational procedure, the effectiveness of their implementation and the rigor of their enforcement are critical factors in determining the actual conditions within the facility, particularly in light of recurring reports alleging substandard conditions and inadequate care¹⁰.

Detainee Population

Types of Detainees

The Otay Mesa Detention Center houses a diverse population of detainees, including adult women and men⁴. Among these are individuals classified as criminal detainees, encompassing both those who have been convicted of crimes and those who are

currently in a pre-trial or pre-sentencing status (remand) ⁴. The facility also holds undocumented migrants who are undergoing administrative processing related to their immigration status ⁶. ICE detainees of all security classification levels are accommodated at the center ⁴. Additionally, the facility houses inmates under the jurisdiction of the US Marshals Service ⁴. Notably, Otay Mesa has been designated by ICE as one of two facilities within its system tasked with serving individuals in immigration detention who have acute mental health needs ⁷. This designation raises significant concerns regarding the adequacy of mental health treatment and the provision of appropriate accommodations within a detention environment that is primarily designed for security and immigration enforcement. The potential for detention settings to exacerbate existing mental health conditions necessitates specialized resources, adequately trained staff, and a focus on therapeutic interventions rather than punitive measures for this vulnerable population ⁷.

Demographics and Nationalities

Information regarding the nationalities of detainees at the Otay Mesa Detention Center suggests some variation over time. Managers at the facility indicated that a significant number of detainees were from Russia, Mexico, and China ³. Data from approximately 2008 revealed that the top three nationalities of detainees leaving the facility were Mexican, Guatemalan, and Salvadoran ¹¹. These differing demographics reported across different time periods may reflect evolving patterns in immigration flows and shifts in the enforcement priorities of immigration authorities ³. Changes in global political and economic conditions, as well as modifications in immigration policies, can influence the nationalities of individuals apprehended and subsequently detained at the border.

Length of Stay

According to local officials cited in one report, the typical length of stay for detainees at the Otay Mesa Detention Center is around 76 days ³. This average duration suggests that for many individuals, detention at this facility may be relatively short-term, potentially indicating a focus on the rapid processing and removal of detainees. However, it is important to recognize that an average figure may not accurately represent the experiences of all detainees. Some individuals with more complex cases or those facing protracted legal proceedings could experience significantly longer periods of detention. Therefore, while the average stay provides a general indication of the facility's role in the detention process, a more comprehensive understanding would require data on the range and distribution of detention lengths across the detainee population ³.

Detainee Transfers and Reasons for Leaving

Data from a 12-month period (likely spanning around 2007-2008) indicates that a total of 4,781 detainees left the Otay Mesa Detention Center, out of a total of 8,982 individuals detained at the facility during that time ¹¹. The primary reasons for their departure included deportation or removal from the United States (63%), being released on bond (11%), voluntary departure (10%), and the termination of their immigration proceedings (8%) ¹¹. Additionally, the data revealed that some detainees had been held in multiple ICE detention facilities before their departure from Otay Mesa ¹¹. This information underscores the facility's central role within the broader immigration enforcement system, primarily functioning as a processing point for individuals being removed from the country. The fact that a portion of detainees are transferred between different detention facilities suggests a complex and potentially disruptive experience for those in custody. Such transfers can interrupt access to legal counsel, disrupt family connections, and create challenges in maintaining continuity of medical or mental health care. Understanding the reasons behind these transfers and their frequency is crucial for assessing the overall impact on the well-being and legal rights of detainees ¹¹.

Visiting Policies and Procedures

Friends and Family Visits

As of February 2025, contact or social video visits for friends and family members are currently suspended at the Otay Mesa Detention Center due to the ongoing pandemic ². Prior to the pandemic, the facility had implemented the following schedules: Video visitation was available seven days a week, with specific time slots allocated to different housing units within the facility ². Contact visitation was limited to ICE detainees only and was available on Saturdays and Sundays during designated hours ². It is important to note that all visits for family and other social purposes are non-contact in nature ². Visitors are subject to search procedures upon entry to the facility, and they are strictly prohibited from passing any items to detainees ². The indefinite suspension of contact and social video visits due to the pandemic has likely had a significant negative impact on the mental and emotional well-being of detainees by severely restricting their opportunities for social interaction with their loved ones. Even before the pandemic-related restrictions, the policy of non-contact visits highlights the inherently restrictive environment of the detention center and the limitations placed on physical interaction between detainees and their support networks ².

Attorney Visits

Legal representatives are permitted to visit their clients at the Otay Mesa Detention Center seven days a week, from 8:15 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.². To facilitate access to legal assistance, the facility posts a list of pro bono (free) legal organizations in all detainee housing units and other appropriate areas; this list is updated quarterly². Additionally, legal representatives have the option to schedule virtual legal visits with their clients by sending an email request or by calling a designated phone number². Appointments for virtual visits should be made at least 24 hours in advance of the desired time and can be scheduled daily (excluding holidays) in increments of 30 to 60 minutes, between 8:15 a.m. and 9:30 p.m.². For attorneys representing detainees at the facility, the submission of the G-28 form (Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Accredited Representative) can now be done electronically through the ERO eFile online platform². The provision of extended hours for attorney visits and the availability of virtual meeting options indicate an effort to support detainees' access to legal counsel. However, it is important to consider that the effectiveness of virtual visits in establishing a strong attorney-client relationship and the practicalities of reviewing extensive legal documents remotely may present challenges. Furthermore, the reliance on detainees to initiate contact with pro bono organizations underscores the importance of ensuring that detainees have adequate access to information and resources to exercise their legal rights².

Consular and Clergy Visits

Consular officials representing the home countries of detained individuals are generally permitted to visit their nationals at any time; however, prior arrangements with the ICE Supervisory Deportation Officer are requested to facilitate these visits². Similarly, members of the clergy are also allowed to visit detainees at any time, provided they make prior arrangements with the facility's Chaplain's Office². These policies reflect the facility's recognition of the importance of maintaining detainees' connections with their national governments and their religious or spiritual advisors.

Comparison with Nearby Facilities

The visiting policies and procedures at the Otay Mesa Detention Center differ from those in place at nearby correctional facilities operated by the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. For instance, the East Mesa Reentry Facility, which is also located in Otay Mesa, offers in-person visits by appointment, with specific days and hours designated for visitation¹². The George Bailey Detention Facility, another county-run facility in the area, also has its own distinct set of visiting rules and schedules¹⁵. These differences in visitation policies between the federal detention center and the county-operated facilities may reflect the varying operational priorities and constraints of these institutions. The generally more restrictive policies at the

Otay Mesa Detention Center, such as the non-contact nature of social visits even before the pandemic and the current suspension of in-person social visits, could be indicative of the facility's focus on housing immigration detainees and the heightened security concerns associated with federal detention operations ².

Table 1: Pre-Pandemic Visiting Hours at Otay Mesa Detention Center (ICE Only)

Type of Visit	Day	Time	Notes
Video Visitation	Seven Days	See specific unit schedules ²	No contact
Contact Visitation	Saturday	7:00 AM - 7:15 PM (various slots) ²	ICE Only, specific unit schedules
Contact Visitation	Sunday	7:00 AM - 7:15 PM (various slots) ²	ICE Only, specific unit schedules
Attorney Visits	Mon - Sun	8:15 AM - 9:30 PM ²	
Virtual Attorney Visit	Mon - Sun	8:15 AM - 9:30 PM (by appointment) ²	30-60 minute increments, schedule 24 hours in advance
Consular Visits	Any	Any time (with prior arrangement) ²	With ICE Supervisory Deportation Officer
Clergy Visits	Any	Any time (with prior arrangement) ²	With Chaplain's Office

Contact Information

General Inquiries

For general inquiries regarding the Otay Mesa Detention Center, the main phone number is (619) 671-8700 ². Information about detainees housed at the facility can be obtained by calling this number between 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday ². The mailing address for the facility is P.O. Box 438150, San Diego, CA 92143-8150 ⁵, and its physical address is 7488 Calzada de la Fuente, San Diego, CA

92154 ². The facility can also be reached by fax at (619) 671-8799 ⁵.

Detainee Contact

Detainees at the Otay Mesa Detention Center are unable to receive incoming phone calls ². However, in the event of an urgent message that needs to be conveyed to a detainee, individuals can call (619) 671-8700 and leave the detainee's full name, alien registration number, as well as their own name and telephone number where they can be reached; the message will then be relayed to the detainee ². The facility provides tablets for detainees, through which they can send non-confidential messages via the website www.gettingout.com ². To send mail to a detainee, the envelope should be addressed as follows: [Detainee's Name], [Detainee's "A" Number], Otay Mesa Detention Center, P.O. Box 439049, San Diego, CA 92143-9049 ¹⁹. The policy of not allowing incoming calls for detainees underscores their isolation within the detention environment and their reliance on external communication initiated by others. While the provision of tablets for non-confidential messaging offers a contemporary means of communication, it is important to consider potential limitations regarding privacy and the cost associated with their use for detainees and their families ².

Legal and Case Information

For inquiries related to immigration court matters involving detainees at Otay Mesa, the contact number is 1-800-898-7180 ². For information concerning cases before the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), the number to call is (703) 605-1007 ². Information regarding the process of posting a delivery bond for a detainee can be found on the ICE website ². Legal representatives can submit the G-28 form electronically to the email address OMDC-G28@ice.dhs.gov ². To contact the Deportation Officer assigned to a detainee's case, the Otay Mesa Detention Center duty line can be reached at (619) 661-3823; however, it is important to note that a G-28 form must be on file for any information to be disclosed ². For legal representatives seeking to schedule virtual visits with their clients, they can either email OMDCLegalVisit@corecivic.com or call (619) 671-8724 ². Legal correspondence intended for detainees can also be sent via email to OMDCLegalVisit@corecivic.com ².

Other Contacts

For reporting information or concerns related to ICE detainees at the facility, the ICE Detention Reporting and Information Line can be contacted at 1-888-351-4024 ⁵. For matters concerning USMS inmates housed at Otay Mesa, the USMS Office of Inspector General can be reached at 1-800-869-4499 ⁵. Members of the press and media with inquiries should contact the ICE Office of Public Affairs at ICEMedia@ice.dhs.gov ². For Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act

requests, individuals can call 1 (866) 633-1182 or send an email to ICE-FOIA@dhs.gov². The main phone number for the ICE Field Office in San Diego is (619) 436-0410². The Office of the Principal Legal Advisor, San Diego (Otay Mesa), can be contacted at (619) 661-3940¹⁸. For news media or congressional inquiries related to the Otay Mesa Immigration Court, the EOIR Office of Policy can be reached at (703) 305-0289 or via email at PAO.EOIR@usdoj.gov¹⁷. Requests for Asylum EAD Clock corrections for the Otay Mesa Immigration Court should be sent to Asylum.Clock.Otay.Mesa@usdoj.gov¹⁷. The extensive array of contact numbers and email addresses associated with the Otay Mesa Detention Center and its related entities reflects the complex network of agencies and departments involved in its operation and oversight. Navigating this system to find the appropriate point of contact for specific inquiries can be a challenging task for detainees, their families, and even legal representatives².

Historical Context and Development

Early Years and Leasing Agreement

The history of the Otay Mesa Detention Center began in 1997 when CoreCivic, then known as Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), entered into a lease agreement with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department⁸. This agreement allowed the company to construct the first immigration detention facility within San Diego County on land leased from the county. The location of this initial facility was in the vicinity of the George Bailey Detention Facility and the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility⁸. The establishment of this facility in the late 1990s signifies the increasing emphasis on immigration enforcement in the San Diego region, a trend likely influenced by its geographical proximity to the US-Mexico border⁸. This development marked a significant shift in the local landscape of immigration control and laid the groundwork for future expansion of detention capabilities in the area.

Shift to Private Ownership and New Facility

The initial lease agreement between **CoreCivic** and the San Diego County Sheriff's Department was not renewed⁸. Subsequently, in 2010, CoreCivic made a significant investment in the region by purchasing a parcel of land in Otay Mesa for \$10.3 million⁸. On this privately owned property, the company constructed a new, purpose-built detention center, which officially opened its doors in 2015⁵. This transition to private ownership and the establishment of a new facility allowed CoreCivic to enter into direct contractual agreements with ICE, which has had the effect of positioning Otay Mesa as a crucial component of the federal immigration detention system, with potentially less direct regulatory oversight from the state government⁸. This change in ownership and contracting structure has important implications for accountability,

transparency, and the potential for future growth of the facility.

Expansion Projects

Indicative of the growing demand for detention space in the region, plans for expansion of the Otay Mesa Detention Center were underway as of 2018, with the potential to double the facility's bed capacity by the year 2020 ⁸. By August 2019, a 512-bed expansion project had been completed ²⁰. Notably, the expansion efforts in 2018 were specifically intended to add beds for inmates under the jurisdiction of the US Marshals Service, further emphasizing the facility's dual role in housing both immigration detainees and federal inmates ⁸. These expansion projects reflect the increasing scale of immigration enforcement activities and the corresponding need for additional detention capacity. The allocation of a significant portion of the expanded capacity to the US Marshals Service underscores the facility's importance not only in immigration matters but also within the broader federal corrections system.

Connection to Other Facilities in Otay Mesa

The Otay Mesa area is characterized by a notable concentration of correctional and law enforcement facilities. In addition to the Otay Mesa Detention Center, the site is home to the Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility, which is operated by the state of California, as well as the George Bailey Detention Facility and the East Mesa Reentry Facility, both of which are managed by San Diego County ¹. The area also includes the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility, another county-run institution, and a firearms training complex that is utilized by various law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the Customs Service ¹. The East Mesa Reentry Facility has been in operation since 1991 and was initially established as a probation camp ¹². The George Bailey Detention Facility began limited operations in 1993 and became fully operational in 1994 ¹⁵. This clustering of diverse correctional and law enforcement infrastructure in the Otay Mesa area suggests a deliberate strategy of co-location for logistical and operational purposes. While this concentration may offer certain efficiencies, it also raises considerations regarding the potential strain on local resources and the overall social impact on the surrounding community ¹.

Conditions and Concerns

Medical Care and Neglect Allegations

The provision of medical care at the Otay Mesa Detention Center has been a subject of significant scrutiny and concern. A wrongful termination lawsuit filed in 2024 by a former nurse supervisor alleged chronic understaffing of nurses at the facility, which reportedly led to inadequate medical care for detainees ¹⁰. The lawsuit cited instances

of poor medical treatment, including cases where detainees developed severe infections from untreated wounds and another where a detainee allegedly suffered multiple organ failure due to improper medical monitoring ¹⁰. Immigration lawyers interviewed in connection with these allegations reported that the claims in the lawsuit corroborated stories they had heard from detainees over several years regarding substandard medical treatment and delays in receiving necessary care ¹⁰. Despite these allegations, the Otay Mesa Detention Center does have an on-site medical clinic staffed by the ICE Health Service Corps, which is intended to provide a range of medical services, including dental care ³. ICE allocated over \$421.5 million in taxpayer funds to the ICE Health Service Corps in fiscal year 2024, which provided care to over 138,000 individuals housed in 18 facilities nationwide, including Otay Mesa ³. The facility's medical clinic also includes isolation rooms for detainees with highly contagious illnesses such as Tuberculosis ³. However, a 2020 report by Disability Rights California highlighted serious concerns about inadequate mental health treatment, an unreliable system for providing accommodations to people with disabilities, the excessive use of isolation, and the denial of needed medical and dental care at the facility ⁷. Furthermore, a 2020 retention memo from the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) indicated that the office had received allegations of civil rights and civil liberties violations at the detention center and would be conducting an onsite investigation ²¹. These persistent allegations from various sources, including a former employee, legal professionals, and advocacy organizations, suggest the potential for systemic issues related to the provision of adequate and timely medical care within the facility ⁷. The apparent contradiction between the stated provision of medical services and the numerous complaints underscores the need for thorough and independent oversight to ensure the health and well-being of detainees.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

The Otay Mesa Detention Center's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has also been a subject of concern. Disability Rights California, in its 2020 report, characterized the facility's response as "wholly inadequate" ⁷. As a result of litigation related to the spread of the virus within the facility, ICE was reportedly compelled to release a significant number of detainees ⁷. Additionally, a 2021 report by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for the Department of Homeland Security noted that during a remote inspection conducted between February and April 2021, it was found that the facility did not always properly inform detainees of upcoming ICE visits. The OIG determined that neglecting to provide this information violated the 2011 Performance-Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) concerning staff-detainee communication ⁹. These reports suggest that the facility faced challenges in

implementing effective measures to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 and in ensuring transparency and communication with detainees regarding official visits during the pandemic ⁷.

Other Concerns and Incidents

Beyond medical care and pandemic response, other concerns and incidents have been reported at the Otay Mesa Detention Center. Human rights advocates have organized events outside the facility to protest deaths that have occurred in ICE custody, alleging that medical neglect, abuse, and trauma contributed to these fatalities ²². In 2017, advocates specifically called for an investigation into the death of a detainee at the facility ²³. As previously mentioned, a 2020 retention memo from the DHS CRCL indicated allegations of broader civil rights and civil liberties violations ²¹. In contrast to these negative reports, a 2022 facility inspection report published by ICE stated that "overall, the detainees were very content with their current conditions" ⁴. However, this finding appears to contradict the numerous other reports from various sources detailing significant concerns about conditions and treatment within the facility. This discrepancy highlights the potential limitations of official inspections in fully capturing the experiences and perspectives of detainees, who may be hesitant to voice complaints directly to authorities ⁴.

Protests and Advocacy

The Otay Mesa Detention Center has been the site of various protests and advocacy efforts. Activists have rallied outside the facility in support of undocumented individuals who have been taken into custody and face deportation ²⁴. Additionally, there are broader grassroots movements that advocate for the closure of private immigration detention facilities like Otay Mesa, citing concerns about the treatment of detainees and the ethics of for-profit detention ²³. These ongoing protests and advocacy initiatives reflect the significant public concern surrounding immigration detention practices and the conditions within facilities such as Otay Mesa. Such actions play a vital role in raising public awareness, holding authorities accountable, and advocating for potential reforms in the immigration detention system ²³.

Table 2: Reports and Concerns Regarding Otay Mesa Detention Center

Source	Date(s)	Key Findings/Allegations
Disability Rights California	October 2020	Inadequate mental health treatment, unreliable

		accommodations, excessive isolation, inadequate medical/dental care, poor COVID-19 response ⁷
DHS Office for Civil Rights and Liberties	October 2020	Received allegations of civil rights and civil liberties violations; planned onsite investigation ²¹
ICE Office of Inspector General	February-April 2021	Facility did not always properly inform detainees of ICE visits ⁹
ICE	January 2022	Annual inspection found overall compliance with PBNDS 2011; "overall, the detainees were very content with their current conditions" ⁴
Jurumay Oliva (former nurse supervisor)	February 2024	Wrongful termination lawsuit alleging chronic understaffing of nurses and inadequate medical care ¹⁰
Immigration Lawyers	Ongoing	Consistent complaints from detainees about poor medical treatment, delays in care, and lack of follow-up ¹⁰
Human Rights Advocates	2017-2024	Protests against deaths in custody, alleging medical neglect, abuse, and trauma ²² ; called for investigation into detainee death in 2017 ²³
News Articles (e.g., NBC San Diego, KPBS)	2017-2024	Reports on protests, individual cases of detainees facing hardship, and allegations of inadequate medical care ¹⁰

Relationship with the Otay Mesa Immigration Court

The Otay Mesa Immigration Court shares the same physical address as the detention center, located at 7488 Calzada de la Fuente, San Diego, CA 92154 ². This court operates under the jurisdiction of the Office of the Chief Immigration Judge, which is a component of the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) within the Department of Justice ¹⁷. Immigration court hearings are generally open to the public, with certain exceptions as specified by law ¹⁷. Individuals wishing to observe hearings do not typically need to notify the court in advance, although coordination with EOIR's Office of Policy is encouraged ¹⁷. Access to the immigration court requires visitors to undergo a security screening process at the Department of Homeland Security-controlled detention facility ¹⁷. For general inquiries directed to the Otay Mesa Immigration Court, the email address is OtayMesa.Immigration.Court@usdoj.gov ¹⁷. Inquiries from news media or congressional offices should be directed to the EOIR Office of Policy ¹⁷. Requests for adjustments to the Asylum EAD Clock for cases at the Otay Mesa court should be submitted via email to Asylum.Clock.Otay.Mesa@usdoj.gov ¹⁷. Information regarding immigration court matters can be obtained by calling the automated information line at 1-800-898-7180 ², and applications for relief from removal must be filed directly with the immigration court ². The public hours for the immigration court are from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays ¹⁷. The physical co-location of the immigration court with the detention center offers a degree of logistical convenience for the processing of detained individuals through the legal system. However, it also raises important considerations about the potential impact of the detention setting on the fairness and impartiality of legal proceedings. The inherent power imbalance between detained individuals and the authorities operating the detention facility could potentially create an environment where detainees feel constrained or intimidated in their interactions with the court ¹⁷.

Conclusion

The Otay Mesa Detention Center stands as a significant facility within the landscape of immigration detention in the United States. Located in San Diego, California, it serves a dual purpose, housing both immigration detainees under the authority of ICE and inmates under the jurisdiction of the US Marshals Service. Owned and operated by the private corporation CoreCivic, the facility has undergone historical evolution, including a transition from leased land to privately owned property, and has experienced expansions in its capacity. While it aims to adhere to federal detention standards, numerous reports and allegations from various sources, including advocacy groups, legal professionals, and even a former employee, raise serious

concerns regarding the conditions within the center, particularly concerning the provision of adequate medical and mental health care. The facility's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has also drawn criticism. The physical proximity of the Otay Mesa Immigration Court to the detention center streamlines certain legal processes but also necessitates careful consideration of the potential influence of the detention environment on the fairness of legal proceedings for detainees. Given the persistent reports of inadequate medical care and other concerns, it is recommended that an independent body conduct regular, unannounced inspections of the Otay Mesa Detention Center and make its findings publicly available to enhance transparency and accountability. Furthermore, ongoing research into the long-term health impacts of detention at this facility and the effectiveness of current oversight mechanisms would be valuable. Continued scrutiny and oversight are essential to ensure the humane treatment and due process rights of all individuals held in custody at the Otay Mesa Detention Center.

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