

# REPORT: EVERGLADES DETENTION FACILITY VISIT

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## BACKGROUND:

On July 12, 2025, I joined U.S. Reps Jared Moskowitz, Darren Soto, and Maxwell Frost, along with a bipartisan group of Florida state lawmakers on a sanitized tour of the Everglades detention facility.

It was 'sanitized' because our unannounced visit was sabotaged by a sudden, pre-planned and organized tour by the Florida Department of Emergency Management (FDEM). In other words, it was not a true oversight inspection. It was a staged look into limited parts of this facility.



## NO ACCOUNTABILITY OR OVERSIGHT:

Before, during and after the tour, the Trump and DeSantis Administrations were intentionally ambiguous about who runs it. We were told that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) determines who is sent there, and that ICE signs off on the standards that are maintained. At the same time, we were told by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that the FDEM decides who is sent there.

Prior to this tour, state lawmakers were denied entry to the facility. During this tour, Members of Congress and lawmakers were blocked from viewing areas where people are detained, a violation of federal law. The Trump and DeSantis Administrations simultaneously argue that the facility is the responsibility of the other to avoid oversight.



## INHUMANE CONDITIONS:

The facility contains cages to hold detainees, with up to 32 people per cage. There is little to no privacy for showering or using the restroom. Food quality is poor, and water comes from a combined toilet/sink. Mosquitoes and other insects are everywhere. There are no working pipes or plumbing, instead water and waste is trucked in and out of the facility.

During the tour, we were allowed to peer in over the shoulders of guards at the threshold of the area where cages held detainees, but not to go inside. We could not talk to detainees. One man yelled that he was an American citizen. Another said he required medical care for four days from drinking bleach-contaminated water.

We noticed staff cleaning the inside of water igloos with bleach wipes. When we asked about it, they denied doing that. When we pointed out that it was currently happening, FDEM stated that the cleaning solution was “safe for consumption.” At least two people were hospitalized due to the conditions.

Detained people have limited to no access to attorneys and family.



## ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS:

Facility operations can produce sediment and runoff that pollute water and the Everglades ecosystem. There are significant risks of petroleum and chemical spills from heavy equipment.

The detention facility generates massive amounts of light pollution in the Everglades, the most remote area of Florida. Artificial lighting disrupts nocturnal wildlife behavior (hunting, breeding, migration) and the natural cycles that both animals and Indigenous communities depend on.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Florida panther families live in the area, as well as threatened and endangered species like the wood stork, snail kite, and rare orchids. Noise, lights and vehicle traffic fragment habitat and displace wildlife.

## DISRESPECT OF TRIBAL LANDS:

For centuries, the Miccosukee and Seminole tribes lived in harmony with animals, who have protected and sustained them. This land has always been a refuge. Now it's being used as an internment camp.

This facility also endangers Indigenous children. The Miccosukee Tribe operates a Pre-K through 12th grade school, with bus routes that pass right by this site. Parents should not have to worry about the safety of their children because of this inhumane facility.

There are at least 19 traditional camps in the area, 11 of which are near this detention facility. Bright lights from the facility disrupt the traditional calendar used by the tribes to track the seasons and schedule sacred ceremonies. This interference undermines centuries-old cultural and spiritual practices that depend on the natural rhythms of this land.

There was no consultation with tribal leaders before construction began.







## ABUSE OF TAXPAYER FUNDS:

The facility costs \$450 million in taxpayer dollars that come from federal resources intended to provide food and shelter to people in the wake of natural disasters. Right now, they are using state dollars. Eventually, the reimbursement would come from federal FEMA funding. The total cost is more than double what it takes to detain someone at the nearby Krome detention center or other Florida facilities.

The state is wasting taxpayer dollars to detain hundreds of people with no criminal record who do not pose a public threat. Several detainees have lawful justification to stay in the country like DACA or humanitarian parole.

## ACTION TO FIGHT BACK:

Five days after our visit, I led all eight members of the Florida Democratic delegation to Congress in sponsoring the *No Cages in the Everglades Act*.

This bill would:

- Prohibit the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and ICE from contracting with, funding or operating any immigration detention facility located in or adjacent to the Everglades.
- Explicitly reaffirm Members of Congress' right to inspect any facility holding federal immigration detainees regardless of whether it is owned or operated by the federal government, a state, or a private contractor.
- Require the DHS Inspector General to investigate and report on the conditions, costs, and impacts of this facility including its effect on detainees, the environment, and nearby tribal lands.

Bottom line: this place needs to be shut down.

