

NH POLITICS

# ‘You are not alone’: Inside jail, volunteers work to save ICE detainees from deportation

At the Strafford County Jail in New Hampshire, the number of detainees has swelled since January — and so has the demand for help

By [Amanda Gokee](#) Globe Staff, Updated March 17, 2025, 12:19 p.m.



ICE detainees wait to speak with Maggie Fogarty (left), coordinator of the New Hampshire Immigrant Visitation Program, in Unit H at the Strafford County Department of Corrections in Dover, N.H., on Feb. 26. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

**D**OVER, N.H. — They crowded forward to a thick red line on the floor that a guard had warned them not to cross, the words “STRAFFORD COUNTY DOC” emblazoned on their

standard issue clothing. The men waited to speak with Maggie Fogarty, who stood on the other side of the red line, but anxieties were rising as time ran short.

Inside the jail, Fogarty is a lifeline, a window to the outside for the men and women who come from different countries but have one thing in common: they have been [detained by ICE](#) and are awaiting [potential deportation](#).

Fogarty coordinates the [New Hampshire Immigrant Visitation Program](#), an initiative of two nonprofits, the Quaker group, American Friends Service Committee, and the [New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ](#). Fighting deportation from inside jail isn't easy. Fogarty is there to help with indecipherable paperwork, an unfamiliar court process, or an unresponsive attorney.

Still, she finds, there's never quite enough time.

"We've had intense periods before, but now the overall numbers are so high, so it feels more unrelenting," she said.

With the Trump administration's promise to [orchestrate a mass deportation](#), the number of ICE detainees at Strafford County Jail has swelled since January, and so has demand for Fogarty's help. What began as a spiritual care program in 2014 has evolved to help inmates find attorneys, navigate the court process, and get access to interpreters.

"We're seeing those numbers go up, and we're seeing people be moved out pretty quickly. Now larger numbers are being deported," said Fogarty.

The Strafford County Jail receives detainees from around New England, one of four local facilities in the region that has such a contract with ICE. At one point in February, the jail's tally of ICE detainees reached 131 people, the highest Fogarty has seen since 2014.

Pam Bingham, right, of the New Hampshire Immigrant Visitation Program, speaks with an ICE detainee in Unit H at the Strafford County Department of Corrections in Dover. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

During a visit to the jail on an overcast day in late February, Fogarty met with a man who'd been detained for two years. His asylum case had been elevated to the US Supreme Court, but he had just learned it was denied and he was preparing for deportation to Latin America. He explained

that the police at home would recognize and apprehend him, making him a sitting duck to the violence he had fled.

“I will be arrested when I return, and I will be killed in prison,” he told Fogarty.

Jail Superintendent Chris Brackett said ICE detainees at the facility could not be publicly identified by name because of ICE policies.

For Fogarty and two other volunteers, the jail’s increase in detainees meant a long list of people to see and only a few hours in which to do so. There was the boy from Haiti they wanted to check in on, a man from Nepal suffering from knee pain, and about 40 others from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jamaica, Ecuador, and Mexico. The volunteers followed Brackett through a series of locking doors that clanged shut behind them as they descended a labyrinth of hallways into the belly of the low-lying brick building.

That day, the volunteers met some people for the first time, including a 21-year-old from Brazil who described his arrest near his home in Bellingham, Mass., which he said involved the FBI and 15 law enforcement cars that responded before officers apprehended him. He’s been accused of being a gang member, an allegation he denied.

ICE did not respond to a request for comment on this story, and the agency did not provide evidence supporting the gang-affiliation claim.

He told the visitation volunteer Pam Bingham he wants to clear his name, but, she said, since he’s already asked to be deported to Brazil, there probably won’t be time to do so.

Yes, he acknowledged, he’d had an out-of-control year — drinking, smoking, and getting in two fights that had resulted in misdemeanor charges. But, he told Bingham, he’d cleaned up his act in the last year, living sober, going to church, the gym, and his landscaping job.

A Brazilian ICE detainee thanks Pam Bingham, a volunteer with the New Hampshire Immigrant Visitation Program, after speaking about his situation, in Unit J at the Strafford County Department of Corrections in Dover, N.H. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

The jail only accepts detainees accused of a crime or found guilty. But being detained by ICE can create complications such as missed court dates for criminal charges, Fogarty said, since ICE doesn’t ensure those in their custody can attend.

Launching an immigration case from inside jail is challenging, she said.

“Phone calls are wicked expensive, and they’re not home as a breadwinner, so their partners are suffering economically, and the idea of paying for an attorney is overwhelming,” Fogarty said.

Sometimes, she said, there are successes, like people who manage to get criminal charges dismissed, which gives them the opportunity to get released from the jail on bond. Through partnerships with the faith community, Fogarty said, they’ve been able to pay those bonds and get people out of jail, which can put them on stronger footing to make an immigration case.

For the jail, the contract with ICE is a business partnership, said Brackett. Its role is limited to housing and transporting those in ICE custody. The 495-bed facility receives \$100 per day per detainee, which helps offset its operating costs. The facility’s overall budget this year is about \$15 million, according to Brackett.

On average, he said ICE detainees stay between 50 to 60 days. The federal agency is looking to expand capacity in the state, facing pressure from the Trump administration to move quickly on deportations.

ICE has [signed an agreement](#) with the Federal Bureau of Prisons to house additional detainees at the federal prison in Berlin, according to a leaked memo, a plan that has drawn pushback from immigrant rights and civil liberties advocates, who say the remote northern location would isolate detainees from legal assistance, family, and advocates. In March, the ACLU of New Hampshire found that at least one immigrant was being detained at the facility, according to the [ICE public online database](#).

After a visit to the jail, Fogarty said she and the other volunteers type up their notes and flag action steps, including tapping church networks to send money to detainees for phone calls or commissary, or nudging an attorney to respond. She’ll look into requests for money to support legal appeals. And, sometimes, the organization helps people prepare for deportation by connecting them with resources in their home country.

In some cases, she said, their role is just to be a compassionate listener in the face of tremendous isolation and anxiety.

“You’ve been fighting for a long time,” Fogarty told one man during the visit in February. “Try to just ground yourself. You are not alone. We’ll be thinking about you.”

Sally Fleming, left, of the New Hampshire Immigrant Visitation Program, meets with an ICE detainee in Unit J. CRAIG F. WALKER/GLOBE STAFF

---

Amanda Gokee can be reached at [amanda.gokee@globe.com](mailto:amanda.gokee@globe.com). Follow her [@amanda\\_gokee](#).

[Show 35 comments](#)

---