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Enforcement and Removal

05/07/2020

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Salvadoran man in ICE custody passes away in San Diego

SAN DIEGO - A 57-year-old Salvadoran man in U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody at Otay Mesa Detention Center died yesterday morning at an area hospital where he was being treated for COVID-19.

On May 6, Carlos Escobar-Mejia was pronounced dead at 2:15 a.m. local time by medical professionals at the Paradise Valley Hospital in National City, California, where he had been hospitalized since April 24, after exhibiting COVID-19-related symptoms. A COVID-19 test was administered April 24 by ICE Health Service Corps (IHSC) and came back positive that same day. Hospital admissions was notified of the positive test results the day he was hospitalized. The preliminary cause of death was listed as undetermined.

Consistent with the agency's protocols, the appropriate agencies have been notified about the death, including the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG), and the ICE Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR). Additionally, ICE has notified the Salvadoran consulate and Escobar-Mejia's next of kin.

Escobar-Mejia entered ICE custody Jan. 10, following his arrest by U. S. Border Patrol near Campo, California, and was transferred to ICE custody at Otay Mesa Detention Center (OMDC) due to pending removal proceedings. A medical screening conducted by IHSC at OMDC Jan. 11 indicated Mr. Escobar-Mejia had hypertension. He also self-identified as having diabetes.

On Jan. 13, ICE filed a motion for change of venue from Los Angeles to San Diego, California. An immigration judge denied him bond April 15 after deeming him a flight risk.

Escobar-Mejia originally entered the U.S. without admission or parole in 1980. Previously, Escobar-Mejia had entered ICE custody in March 2012 following his arrest on local charges by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department. He was released on an immigration bond in June 2012. His criminal convictions include grand theft, possession of a controlled substance, receiving known stolen property and DUI.

ICE is firmly committed to the health and welfare of all those in its custody and is undertaking a comprehensive, agency-wide review of this incident, as it does in all such cases. Fatalities in ICE custody, statistically, are exceedingly rare and occur at a fraction of the national average for the U.S. detained population.

The agency's review will be conducted by ICE senior leadership, including Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) and the Office of the Principal Legal Advisor (OPLA).

IHSC ensures the provision of necessary medical care services as required by ICE Performance-Based National Detention Standards and based on the medical needs of the detainee. Comprehensive medical care is provided from the moment detainees arrive and throughout the entirety of their stay. All ICE detainees receive medical, dental and mental health intake screening within 12 hours of arriving at each detention facility, a full health assessment within 14 days of entering ICE custody or arrival at a facility, and access to daily sick call and 24-hour emergency care. Pursuant to our commitment to the welfare of those in the agency's custody, ICE annually spends more than \$269 million on the spectrum of healthcare services provided to detainees.

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