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Enforcement and Removal

05/19/2020

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South Korean man in ICE custody passes away in California

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - A South Korean man in the custody of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center in Bakersfield, California, died Sunday.

Choung Woong Ahn, 74, was pronounced dead at 9:52 p.m. local time May 17, 2020 by medical professionals. Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center staff found Ahn unresponsive in his cell. Efforts by facility staff and emergency personnel to revive him were unsuccessful. The preliminary cause of death appears to be self-inflicted strangulation; however, the case is currently under investigation.

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 South Korean consulate and requested that they notify Ahn's next of kin.

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

Ahn was lawfully admitted as a permanent resident to the United States in 1988.

On June 25, 2013, the Superior Court of California, County of Alameda, convicted Ahn for the offense of attempted murder with an enhancement for using a firearm and sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

He entered ICE custody Feb. 21 this year upon his release from Solano State Prison, Vacaville, California and was taken to Mesa Verde ICE Processing Center.

The U. S. District Court of the Northern California District of California denied Ahn's request for bail on May 13. At the time of his death, Ahn was in custody pending removal proceedings.

ICE's Health Service Corps (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

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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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