

IMMIGRATION

Muslim ICE Detainees In Florida Given Choice Between Rotten Food And Pork

Muslim Congressmembers -- all three of them! -- have demanded an investigation.

By LORELEI LAIRD

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Like many other things in our society, “religious freedom” has always been more achievable for Christians than anyone else. If you doubt me, consider that a majority of the U.S. Supreme Court declared with a straight face in *Trump v. Hawaii* that the “Muslim ban” is religiously neutral. By contrast, the Supreme Court has recently given Christians the right to [shill for Jesus during town meetings](#), [block sidewalks outside abortion clinics](#), [lie to pregnant women about being doctors](#), [lie to voters](#), and [fire teachers for getting cancer](#). This is not a complete list.

Meanwhile, in Miami, Muslim immigrants at ICE’s Krome detention center would just like some decent food. [The Miami New Times reported](#) in late August that ICE officials have been giving their Muslim charges halal meals that are expired and rotten. Muslims who don’t want to eat this are permitted to eat the “regular” meal — but the regular meal is often

something haram (“forbidden”).

This presents a conundrum for the detainees, who, like all humans, need to eat food on a regular basis. One detainee described the halal meals as “a chili gravy substance that ... looks like dog food.” He ate it anyway and got diarrhea, so now he often doesn’t eat at all.

The problem has existed throughout the pandemic, but it’s becoming public in August because the detainees have repeatedly tried to resolve this through the detention center’s grievance process. The New Times says ICE has ignored multiple complaints; advocate Lily Hartmann of Americans for Immigrant Justice told the alt-weekly, “To us, it seems like they simply don’t care.” Hartmann noted that this kind of callousness is the way that the immigration system was intentionally designed and also suggested it may be a factor that many of the Muslim detainees at Krome are black. (Good thing we have Nikki Haley to remind us that [America is not a racist country!](#))

Hartmann’s organization outlined all of this in an [August 19 letter](#) co-authored by the public interest organization Muslim Advocates and the law firm of King & Spalding. Now, the three Muslim members of Congress have taken up the cause. Reps. Rashida Tlaib, D-MI, Ilhan Omar, D-MN, and Andre Carson, D-IN, [sent a letter Monday](#) to the Department of Homeland Security’s Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, asking it to investigate the complaint. The three Congressmembers (and their 26 co-signers) noted that forcing people to choose between haram meals and rotten food is a clear violation of their rights under the First Amendment and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, as well as a violation of ICE’s own Performance-Based National Detention Standards.

The Congressmembers asked the civil rights office to ensure that Muslim detainees have access to fresh pork-free food and look into this across all the detention centers. Given what happens to CBP officers who murder people — [usually nothing](#) — and the fiercely anti-immigrant sentiment among DHS leaders, I’m not holding my breath. Here’s hoping members of Congress have the pull to prove me wrong.
