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Sr. Susan Rose Francois of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace poses next to the sign outside the family and detainee support tent in front of Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey. (Courtesy of Eyes on ICE NJ/Joseph O'Leary)



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For more than a year, a network of community leaders has provided public witness, solidarity and mutual aid in support of detained immigrant neighbors and their families at Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey.

Delaney Hall opened in May 2025 and is operated by the private prison corporation GEO Group under a 15-year $1 billion government contract. It is the largest detention center on the East Coast. Five miles from my convent, it has been on my radar for over a year but has just recently entered the national consciousness due to a courageous hunger and labor strike by those held captive behind its walls.

The Eyes on ICE NJ coalition includes a diverse collection of organizations: Catholics like the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace and Pax Christi New Jersey, other faith groups, peace organizations, earnest people from local community and political organizations and immigration advocates. Then there are just ordinary folks who are looking for a way to make a real difference in the face of the cruelty that is happening in our name. We are committed to a common mission to oppose Delaney Hall and the unjust operations of ICE through nonviolence, mutual aid, radical hospitality and interfaith cooperation until the facility ceases operations. We are here for the long haul, and we center the concerns of our immigrant neighbors who are detained and the real needs of their families left behind. For the past year, volunteers have been present every visiting day to staff the "Radical Hospitality" tent or to peacefully stand vigil outside the facility on non-visiting days.

I have come to consider my fellow volunteers as my friends and could not help but think of them as I read these words from Pope Leo XIV in *Magnifica Humanitas*:

> [B]uilding a world in which everyone can flourish requires shared responsibility and courage. No one can singlehandedly bear the weight of the challenges the world is facing, just as no one is so weak that they cannot play their part, for "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). ... We should not be intimidated by tensions or differences because they can become creative forces when guided by shared responsibility.

I'll be honest: We don't always at first agree on details, but we agree on our values and that is what matters. We agree that the cruelty happening in our name is unacceptable. We believe that our friends in detention and their families come first. This isn't easy on the best of days, and it has become even more difficult with the recent attention and activity outside Delaney Hall this past week. The increased focus was sparked by a family-led press conference the Friday before Memorial Day weekend, highlighting the inhumane conditions their loved ones are facing. More than 300 people held at Delaney Hall then went on a hunger and labor strike to raise awareness and concern for the most vulnerable among them.



A protester holds a sign as ICE agents stand guard outside the Delaney Hall detention during a protest against the transfer of detainees on May 26, 2026, in Newark, N.J. For the past year, volunteers have been present every visiting day to staff the "Radical Hospitality" tent or to peacefully stand vigil outside the facility on non-visiting days. (AP/Andres Kudacki)

The strong response of ICE and GEO Group to the strike inside and protests taking place outside Delaney Hall indicate the impact the labor strike must be having on their bottom line. Detainees and their families are also being retaliated against, with visitation canceled and access to commissary and communication cut off.

The labor strike is critical because GEO Group's profits depend on the cheap labor of detainees to clean and cook for $1 a day. Last year a GEO executive announced during a shareholder call that they expected to make $60 million a year profit at Delaney Hall. Yet New Jersey U.S. Sen Andy Kim, Rep. Rob Menendez, and other members of the New Jersey Congressional Delegation have conducted oversight visits and confirmed the complaints from detainees about inedible food, lack of medical care and poor sanitary conditions. "We just came out of there and I will tell you that everything in that letter was 100% correct," said Rep. LaMonica McIver.



Sr. Susan Rose Francois of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace poses with the clothing compliance station in front of Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey, where volunteers provide clothes to family members who fail to meet the dress code for visitors. (Courtesy of Michael Francois)

The demands of the strikers are simple. They want to meet directly with the governor, who has been repeatedly denied entry by GEO and ICE. They are concerned for the elderly, young people and medically vulnerable who are also detained and are advocating for their immediate release.

Their cry for help — the first letter signed by 24 men detained at Delaney Hall was titled "Our Cry" — fell on deaf ears. And so they wrote a second letter titled "SOS," which was signed by 300 male and female detainees. This call was also not heeded, and so they put their bodies on the line and went on strike. Ultimately, they are striking in defense of their humanity and, given what is being done in our name, our humanity.

They know that they are created in the image and likeness of God and their actions call us to remember that as well. In the words of Leo:

> Created for relationship, every human person is planned and willed by God to enter into communion with him, with others and with creation. Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth or position in life, nor on the right or wrong choices made; instead, it is a gift that precedes and transcends each person, endowed by God as an expression of his unfailing love.

Despite the inhumane treatment and lack of due process these men and women have received, they still believe in our common humanity and our Creator God.

"We are in a difficult situation," they wrote in their second letter, "and we trust in God and believe that justice will be done under the law of the United States of America, since it is a sovereign and constitutional country respected worldwide for upholding human rights."

Do we have such faith, strength and resilience to stand beside them? May we all exercise our shared responsibility to defend our magnificent humanity.

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