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A small metal enclosure, with 18 square feet of floor space and used in a monitored "calming area," is seen Jan. 21, 2026, during an unannounced inspection of ICE's now-closed immigration detention center Florida Soft-Sided Facility by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General. (OSV News/DHS OIG, handout via Reuters)

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Dozens of detainees at Florida's now-shuttered immigrant detention center "Alligator Alcatraz" were held in 18-square-foot outdoor cages — about the same size as telephone booths — according to a new report by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General.

The report, dated Sept. 11 but published Sept. 14, detailed a January 2026 inspection of the facility, which was officially named the Florida Soft-Sided Facility. "Alligator Alcatraz" was shuttered in June.

The report detailed unhygienic conditions in the facility, such as bug-infested showers, and only allowing detainees to shower three times per week, instead of daily, as standards require. It also found food stored at improper temperatures and dirty drinking water.

David Spicer, director of policy and engagement for migration at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News, "These findings from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's [DHS] independent oversight agency are quite disturbing."

"Unfortunately, such violations of the government's own detention standards are also not entirely surprising," he said. "Whether it's ensuring equal access to religious services or abiding by protections specific to families and children, the government's detention standards are only credible if they're consistently upheld across all detention facilities.

"This is among the reasons why the USCCB has repeatedly urged regular oversight by both the federal agencies charged with that responsibility and Congress."

"The immense pressure currently being exerted on DHS to expand immigration detention capacity as quickly as possible — using the influx of funding received by the Department over the past year — merely exacerbates the need for this oversight," Spicer added.

As Bishop Brendan J. Cahill of Victoria, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration, "said earlier this year," he noted, "these issues should be a cause for deeper reflection. Ultimately, this is about protecting human life and dignity, and the immigration status of those in these detention facilities make them no less deserving of that protection."

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Among the report's findings were that the Florida facility "confined 79 detainees in small metal enclosures — each offering about 18 square feet of floor space — for periods ranging from several minutes to nearly 2 hours, a practice unlike any OIG team has observed in ICE facilities."

"The use of such restrictive spaces is highly unconventional and does not align with standards for humane treatment," the report said.

The report said staff at the facility described the small metal enclosures — which measured approximately 4 feet 3 inches wide on each side and 7 feet 9 inches tall — as "calming areas" for detainees "to deescalate and have time alone."

Alex Lanfranconi, communications director for Gov. Ron DeSantis, R-Fla., argued in a statement that "left-wing media wants to focus on a confinement area for violent criminal aliens who have proven they cannot remain peaceful while awaiting deportation."

"While it adheres to all federal standards for criminal confinement, we'd make it even smaller if we could," Lanfranconi added.

Anna Gallagher, executive director of the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, also known as CLINIC, told OSV News, "The findings in this report are horrifying."

"Confining people in tiny metal enclosures for hours is inhumane, and it should never be normalized as part of our immigration system," she said. "Our Catholic faith calls us to recognize the God-given dignity of every person, and these practices violate that fundamental commitment. This report demands accountability and immediate action to ensure every person in government custody is treated with the dignity they deserve."

The report said staff at the facility "could not clearly identify which detention standards they used," and that the absence of "well-defined standards at detention facilities increases the risk that detainees may not receive appropriate care."

The inspector general therefore compared conditions at the facility against both Florida Model Jail Standards and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's National Detention Standards 2019 and "applied the more restrictive standard to support our findings."

Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy and communications at the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the former director of migration policy for the USCCB, told OSV News, "I think this report might be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the inhumane treatment of detainees in immigration detention."

"In the One Big Beautiful Bill, Congress basically wrote a blank check for ICE to expand detention facilities without any oversight, so we will sadly see more of this type of treatment around the country," Appleby said.

He added, "Credit is due" to Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski and the Archdiocese of Miami "for putting pressure on DHS to close Alligator Alcatraz."

"Similar campaigns should be launched in other dioceses in which new detention facilities are being built," he said.

Wenski's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In its response to the inspector general report, the Department of Homeland Security said it would not be implementing the recommendations for improving the facility since "the FSSF has been permanently closed."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.