

# Immigrants at prison say they live in squalor

**By Anna Kaminski**  
Kansas Reflector

TOPEKA — Immigrants being held inside a federal prison in northeast Kansas and their attorneys reported an unsanitary, inequitable and unhealthy environment that has left people, even those who have won their immigration cases, deprived of basic needs.

Based on interviews with people inside the prison and attorneys representing those people, immigrants face unsanitary and crowded living quarters, extended lockdowns, delayed and costly medical treatment, restricted contact with their families, and no access to religious services.

In some cases, these conditions have led to suicide attempts.

“These aren’t criminals,” said Michael Sharma-Crawford, a local immigration attorney and chair of the Kansas and Missouri chapter of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. “In theory, none of these people deserve to be in jail.”

A pair of letters — one sent to the warden of the Leavenworth Federal Correctional Institution complaining of a rat infestation and another sent to the warden, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Prisons — detail conditions that are “well below” what is required of the federal agencies.

Attorneys and advocates claim in the letters, sent May 5 and May 29, that a “significant number” of people remain imprisoned at Leavenworth despite having won their immigration



Leavenworth Federal Correctional Institution is subject of criticism from civil rights groups and immigration attorneys. Tim Carpenter/Kansas Reflector photo

cases, which often fall under civil law, not criminal. Some cannot return to their countries of origin because, upon return, they could face torture or violence.

While the possibility of securing release for people facing deportation is low, Sharma-Crawford said ensuring they are held within legal standards could be done.

Leavenworth, formerly the Fort Leavenworth Military Prison, is one of two facilities in the state currently used to detain immigrants.

In February, ICE and the Bureau of Prisons agreed to hold immigrants at Leavenworth. A separate

facility in Leavenworth, a shuttered prison owned by private company CoreCivic, was planned to reopen and detain immigrants as well, but a judge blocked the company from doing so Wednesday based on local zoning rules.

Sharma-Crawford said he has heard anecdotes about ICE officials in and around Chicago driving across the region, including to Kansas and Missouri, trying to find a place to hold people.

More than 1,300 men are typically held in the medium-security prison, and about 220 are held in a minimum security “satellite camp.” At least 80 immigrants are being held at

Leavenworth, according to the letter.

Randilee Giamusso, a spokeswoman for the prison bureau, declined to comment on the letter’s claims but confirmed the bureau received the letter. “The Federal Bureau of Prisons is committed to ensuring the safety and security of all inmates in our population, our staff, and the public. We have received the letter,” Giamusso wrote in an email. “However, we do not comment on matters related to pending litigation, legal proceedings, or investigations.”

Media officials at ICE did not respond to requests seeking a comment.

“Several immigrants” at Leavenworth experienced such a depression from extended lockdown periods, which often lasted 20 hours and sometimes as long as three days, that they attempted suicide, said the May 29 letter signed by a collection of eight civil rights organizations and attorney groups. After their suicide attempts, they were reportedly put in solitary confinement.

“One detainee who witnessed a suicide attempt has felt depressed and fearful during subsequent lockdowns,” the letter said, “but has been afraid to report his mental health symptoms to staff for fear that he, too,

will be removed from the unit and will be placed in solitary confinement.”

Another representative of the prison bureau declined to confirm or deny the letter’s claims about suicide attempts in Leavenworth.

Karla Juarez, executive director of Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation, said in a news release that the conditions at Leavenworth are horrifying. “What’s happening at FCI Leavenworth is not only a violation of ICE’s own policies — it’s a violation of our shared humanity,” she said. “These are people who have already won their immigration cases and who should be free with their families, not locked in overcrowded cells without access to medical care or even sunlight.”

People serving sentences from criminal convictions at Leavenworth are able to use the prison’s outdoor yard for recreation and exercise. Those in ICE’s custody are not, despite that being a condition of the two agencies’ collaboration. The agreement between the federal agencies said: “ICE detainees will have access to education and psychology materials, leisure and law libraries, and indoor and outdoor recreation.”

Reports from inside the prison have found that people being held for immigration reasons have access to none of these things.

Plus, a pervasive language barrier has created a hurdle for immigrants in the prison who say their basic needs aren’t being met, the letter said.

Those imprisoned for

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# ‘Far from over’: Kansas schools still see Covid’s effects

**By Suzanne Perez**  
Kansas News Service

WICHITA — The children in Susie Kelley’s class at Harry Street Elementary School were kindergartners when the Covid pandemic shut down schools and sent students home for remote learning. Now they’re finishing fifth grade and preparing for middle school. And though it’s been years since they were wearing masks in class or tapping into reading lessons online, they still reflect the effects of the pandemic.

“Those formative, foundational skills and those years were lost, and it’s going to take us some time to get it back,” Kelley said. “Even though it was five years ago, we’re still behind.”

Kansas educators say the pandemic’s stress and isolation affected children differently depending on their age and level of development. But students who began their schooling around 2020 are at greater risk of falling behind academically.

For Kelley, that means fifth-grade students who lack some basic developmental skills. “I had to teach a child how to hold a pencil,” she said. “By the fifth grade, you shouldn’t have to do that. But if they were on the computer, they didn’t learn how to hold the pencil or how to form letters.”

Teachers try to address gaps with one-on-one instruction. Kelley worked an extra 10 minutes a day with a student who needed help learning to write.

But learning losses go beyond reading, writing, and math. Numerous studies point to a generation of students who also lack social skills, such as managing their emotions, communicating their needs, or working with peers. “They have grown, even from the beginning of the year to now,” Kelley said. “But there’s still something about not wanting to be close to people. Or just the opposite — being very, very clingy. ... And I have both extremes in my classroom.”

Shortly after schools returned to in-person classes, Kansas schools reported more fights between students and behavioral blow-ups. Educators blame the increase in part on the pandemic, saying long stretches of online learning meant limited socialization and difficulty adjusting to life back in the classroom.

Wichita Superintendent Kelly Bielefeld said those challenges continue. “It’s easy to say, ‘This was five years ago. The impact is over,’” and with some children that’s true, Bielefeld said. “But with other groups, I think the impact is still very, very real.”

Another persistent challenge since the pandemic: Getting kids to show up for class. During the 2023-24 school year, nearly one in five Kansas students was chronically absent, which means they missed at least 10% of instruction time. Older students struggled with the transition to remote learning and then back to a normal school

routine. Some saw their mental health suffer and lost the motivation to attend class. With younger students, families are more likely to keep them home with minor cold or allergy symptoms, so the once-rare sick day is becoming more commonplace.

Wichita district leaders challenged schools this year to return to pre-pandemic attendance rates. Jamie Junker, principal at Harry Street Elementary, said it’s been difficult. “We’re celebrating a lot of growth this year, creating a sense of belonging so our kids want to be here when they get up in the morning. They want to come to school,” Junker said. “But for many of our families, they have circumstances that are way outside of (having) an alarm clock to wake them up and get here. It’s much more than that.”

Harry Street’s average daily attendance was 92% this school year — an improvement over last year, but still not at the 93% before the pandemic.

Congress approved three Covid relief packages that sent about \$276 billion to K-12 schools and universities. Kansas received nearly \$2 billion, which schools and colleges used to reopen safely and help students who had fallen behind. Wichita and other districts spent some of that federal aid to expand summer school programs. But despite incentives such as free breakfast, lunch, and transportation, only a fraction of students enrolled.

Federal funding also paid for additional psychologists, counselors, and social workers at many schools. Junker said that has made a difference. “Having the (federal) money funneled for the purpose of social and emotional well-being, that sense of belonging in our school, that then helps us to be able to tackle those academics,” she said.

As Kansas districts celebrate the end of another school year, teachers say

they’ll continue to monitor and address pandemic learning gaps and other challenges. “It’s far from over,” Junker said. “Luckily,

we have amazing middle schools, and our sixth-grade teams, they know the challenges. They are ready for them.”

## SOUTHEAST OF SALINE MENU

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CH-2902179

### PUBLIC NOTICE

**IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF SALINE COUNTY, KANSAS** In the Matter of the Estate of: MICHAEL J. GREENE, SR., Deceased Case No. 25 PR 81  
**NOTICE TO CREDITORS**  
THE STATE OF KANSAS TO ALL PERSONS CONCERNED: YOU ARE hereby notified that on this 29th day of May, 2025, pursuant to a Petition for Appointment of Administratrix Under Kansas Simplified Estates Act and Issuance of Letters of Administration was filed in this Court by Michelle Brockelman. Michelle Brockelman was appointed Administratrix, duly qualified as Administratrix and Letters of Administration pursuant to the Kansas Simplified Estates Act, were issued to her on the 30th day of May, 2025, by the District Court of Saline County, Kansas. All creditors of the above-named decedent are notified to exhibit their demands against the estate within four (4) months from the date of the first publication of this notice as provided by law, and if their demands are not thus exhibited, they shall be forever barred.  
/s/Michelle Brockelman  
Michelle Brockelman, Administratrix  
ROBERT G. GERMAN, S.C. 10420 219 No. Santa Fe Ave. Salina, Kansas 67401 (785) 825-9175  
Attorney for Petitioner  
Publish: Lindsborg News-Record  
Date: June 12, 19 and 26, 2025  
3548550

First published in Gypsum Advocate on June 12, 2025  
**IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF SALINE COUNTY, KANSAS**  
In the Matter of the Estate of: KENNETH RAY CROWDER, Deceased Case No. 25 PR 89  
**NOTICE OF HEARING AND NOTICE TO CREDITORS**  
THE STATE OF KANSAS TO ALL PERSONS CONCERNED: YOU ARE hereby notified that a petition dated June 6, 2025, has been filed in the Saline County District Court by Teresa Bates, as sister and heir at law of the decedent, Kenneth Ray Crowder, praying for the appointment of Teresa Bates as Administratrix without bond. You are further advised that the Petitioner in this matter has requested administration pursuant to the Kansas Simplified Estates Act, and if such request is granted the Court may not supervise administration of the estate and no further notice of any action of the Administratrix other proceedings in the administration will be given except for the notice of final settlement of the decedent's estate. Should written objections to simplified administration be filed with the Court, the Court may order supervised administration to ensue. You are hereby required to file your written defenses to the admission of the decedent's Will to probate on or before the 7th day of July, 2025 at 8:30 o'clock A.M. in this court in the City of Salina, Saline County, Kansas, at which time and place the cause will be heard. Should you fail therein, judgment and decree will be entered in due course upon the petition. All creditors are notified to exhibit their demand against the estate with four (4) months from the date of the first publication of this notice as provided by law, and if their demands are not thus exhibited they shall be forever barred.  
/s/Teresa Bates  
Teresa Bates, Petitioner  
SUBMITTED BY:  
ROBERT G. GERMAN, S.C. 10420 219 No. Santa Fe Ave. Salina, Kansas 67401 (785) 825-9175  
Publish: Lindsborg News-Record  
Date: June 12, 19 and 26, 2025  
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