

TRUST AND CONSEQUENCES

The government required him to see a therapist. He thought his words would be confidential. Now, the traumatized migrant may be deported.

by Hannah Dreier

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Kevin Euceda, an asylum-seeker from Honduras, looks into his detention facility's yard. He has been held more than 900 days. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

It was time for another hearing in the ongoing efforts of the U.S. government to deport a Honduran teenager named Kevin Euceda, who had already been in detention for more than two years. In a Northern Virginia courtroom, U.S. immigration judge

Helaine Perlman peered at a TV screen as a detainee came into blurry view: a slight 19-year-old with deep dimples and a V-shaped scar on his forehead. “Buenos días,” Kevin said, hoping this was the day he would find out about his request for asylum, and then tried to follow along as Perlman began to explain the latest twist.

“I had made a decision granting your request — but the government disagreed with it,” she said. “They want me to make a new decision.”

Kevin was watching from a remote detention center. On one side of the judge, he could see his lawyers, ready to argue that he should be freed immediately. Across from them was a lawyer for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), there to argue that Kevin should be deported. And in front of them all, inside a thick folder, was an old report from a shelter for immigrant children that was the reason the long-running matter of Kevin Euceda existed at all: “Youth reports history of physical abuse, neglect, and gang affiliation in country of origin. Unaccompanied child self-disclosed selling drugs. Unaccompanied child reports being part of witnessing torturing and killing, including dismemberment of body parts,” the report said.

The person who had signed it: A therapist at a government shelter for immigrant children who had assured Kevin that their sessions would be confidential. Instead, the words Kevin spoke had traveled from the shelter to one federal agency and then another, followed him through three detention centers, been cited in multiple ICE filings arguing for his detention and deportation, and now, in the fall of 2019, were about to be used against him once more.

This kind of information sharing was part of a Trump administration strategy that is technically legal but which professional therapy associations say is a profound violation of patient confidentiality. To bolster its policy of stepped up enforcement, the administration

is requiring that notes taken during mandatory therapy sessions with immigrant children be passed onto ICE, which can then use those reports against minors in court. Intimate confessions, early traumas, half-remembered nightmares — all have been turned into prosecutorial weapons, often without the consent of the therapists involved, and always without the consent of the minors themselves, in hearings where the stakes can be life and death.

One of Kevin's lawyers leaned into her microphone and asked Perlman to make a ruling as soon as possible. "Kevin has been in detention for 856 days today," she said.

The ICE attorney said the government would continue to assert that Kevin was a danger to the country, and would rely on its latest legal filing, including references to that first therapist's report.

As the lawyers argued back and forth in English, Kevin watched in silence. He only understood a few words here and there, but after two years he knew enough to understand that he was at the mercy of a stranger's interpretations of things he had said when he'd been younger, frightened, and so naive he might as well have been a different person.

Finally, the judge turned to him again and asked the interpreter to translate. "I'm going to take a very short amount of time to look at the documents, and then I'm going to issue a decision," she said. "I'll work as quickly as possible. I know you've been waiting a long time."

* * *



On his way to the United States from Honduras when he was 17, Kevin and his sister crossed the Rio Grande — seen between Reynosa, Mexico, and Hidalgo, Tex. — on an inflatable raft. (Jahi Chikwendiu/The Washington Post)

Each of the 856 days Kevin had been in detention traced back to an evening in May 2017 when he walked into a small, cheery room in a repurposed nursing home to talk with a woman who introduced herself as a therapist and offered her help.

Kevin had crossed the Rio Grande with his 18-year-old sister on an inflatable raft the day before, gotten lost in the Texas scrub, and been found by the U.S. Border Patrol. Agents had sent his sister to an ICE detention center to be jailed until she could be deported. But Kevin was 17, a minor, and so he was transferred to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a federal agency responsible for the custody of each of the tens of thousands of immigrant children who

come to the United States alone or are separated from their families at the border every year.

ORR was charged with watching over Kevin's health and well-being until he could be released to live in the United States while his request for asylum was being processed. The agency placed Kevin at one of its 195 contracted shelters — a one-story building called New Hope, in McAllen, Tex. There, as required by ORR policy, Kevin was offered a chance to shower and brush his teeth, taken to a closet to pick out clothes and given a medical checkup. With each step, shelter staff entered information about him into a database. One of them noted the scar on Kevin's forehead, and wrote that he was feeling "really good" despite what a doctor logged as a "cough" and "sore throat" he'd picked up during the three-month journey from Honduras. Next up was a required meeting with a therapist.

On his own since he was 12, Kevin had gotten used to watching adults to see if they were going to hurt him. Mostly, they had. But, Kevin remembered, the New Hope workers seemed friendly and sincere. He was comforted by the smell of spiced cider in the building's halls and the children's drawings taped up everywhere, and so, even though he had only a vague idea of what a therapist did, he was ready to talk to a counselor named Leyanira Trevino, who explained that their conversation would remain private unless he talked about harm to himself or others.

"This is your opportunity to tell us your story," she said, and so he told her about being abandoned by his parents and raised by his alcoholic grandmother. He described how his grandmother had sliced into his back with a machete, and once thrown a rock at his head, leaving him with his scar. "Youth reports the physical abuse stopped when his grandmother passed away due to drinking," Trevino later wrote in her report.

Kevin explained that after his grandmother died, the gang MS-13 took over their shack. With nowhere else to go, he stayed even as gang members tortured rivals on the patio, slept in his bed and made him run their errands. The gang eventually put him to work selling drugs. "Youth denied committing murder; however, when asked if he had ever physically hurt another individual, minor stated I did things I regret," Trevino wrote.

What Kevin regretted most, he would later testify in asylum proceedings, was what had happened to his cousin Ramon. Ramon had refused to join MS-13, Kevin would testify, and the gang had kidnapped him in retaliation. Kevin asked the gang leaders to spare his cousin, but instead, they ordered him to come to a shack by a river and join in the torture. Ramon was already in a heap on the floor when Kevin arrived, and had begged for his help. "Please," Kevin remembered him saying, "You are my flesh and blood." Terrified to disobey gang orders, Kevin had walked up and kicked his cousin once in the chest, then backed away as the others moved in. When night fell, Kevin snuck out of the shack and hurried toward the dark riverbank. He heard shots behind him and knew his cousin was dead.

A few weeks later, gang leaders ordered Kevin to kill a stranger to prove his loyalty. "Minor was told by gang members that he was required to kill someone he did not know, which prompted minor to convince his sister to run away with him to the U.S.," Trevino wrote. A stream of threatening text messages from the gang followed the siblings north. "Minor disclosed that he fears being deported because abandoning his gang results in death," Trevino wrote.

Trevino, at that point, had been on the job for six months. She had graduated the year before with a master's in rehabilitation counseling, after studying law enforcement in college, and was still a year away from passing her licensing exam. An internal audit has found

that ORR therapists often feel unprepared to deal with the trauma they encounter in immigrant children, but Kevin felt relieved after talking with her. He walked out of the session feeling lighter for having shared some of his most shameful secrets, while Trevino finished her three-page report with an account of how she'd counseled him:

"Clinician used client centered approach, providing active listening, empathy, and clarification," she wrote. "Youth states feeling safe and secure."

Then, because Kevin had mentioned gang activity, Trevino followed policy and sent her report to the shelter director and four regional ORR supervisors. A few days later, Kevin met with a second therapist who added several details to Trevino's report, including that "Unaccompanied child states that his involvement in the gang included physically assaulting victims." The following week, the therapist asked to see Kevin again. Kevin thought maybe he was going to get to call his sister, who he hadn't spoken with since they were separated at the border. Instead, the therapist explained that because of what he had said, ORR had decided Kevin should be transferred rather than released. Kevin's response was recorded in his file: "Unaccompanied child states, 'Why are you going to send me to another center? I haven't done anything wrong while I've been here.'" The next day, Kevin was sent from New Hope, where the average stay was 53 days, to a high-security detention center designed to hold immigrant children for months or years.

* * *



Left: Immigrant children wait in line at the New Hope shelter in McAllen, Tex., where Kevin spent 10 days in detention before being transferred. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services) **Right:** A hallway at Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center in Virginia, where Kevin spent 113 days before being transferred to adult detention. (Associated Press)

The reason Kevin or any other teenager would see a therapist after crossing the border goes back to a 1997 court-ordered settlement that established minimum detention standards for immigrant children. For years, children have been required to meet with counselors within 72 hours of entering custody, and then at least once a week until their release.

This therapy has historically been carried out with the mission of supporting children during a stressful time. In 2017, ORR began modifying that mission. Shortly after being appointed by Trump, then-ORR head Scott Lloyd introduced a policy of moving minors who self-disclosed gang ties to secure detention, and, as he said in congressional testimony, “working to enhance our day-to-day consultations” with ICE. Explaining further in a recent interview, Lloyd said he acted in response to concerns about criminals coming across the border. “There definitely were policy changes,” he said. “I could see there being no downside to just sharing information.”

A year later, in April 2018, ORR went a step further and entered into a formal Memorandum of Agreement with ICE to share details about children in its care. Explaining the strategy to Congress,

Steven Wagner, who was overseeing ORR at that point, testified that among other things, the agency would be asking its therapists to “develop additional information” about children during “weekly counseling sessions where they may self-disclose previous gang or criminal activity to their assigned clinician.” The agency added two requirements to its public handbook: one that arriving children be informed that while it was essential to be honest with staff, self-disclosures could affect their release and the other that if a minor mentioned anything having to do with gangs or drug dealing, therapists would file a report within four hours to be passed to ICE within one day.

“One of the big factors we consider is, are we putting the community at large at risk?” Jallyn Sualog, current deputy director for children’s programs at ORR, said in defense of the policy. “We’re housing children with an eye toward child welfare, but these kids are not meant to be in our care forever; they’re meant to get out.” She explained that ORR acts in the role of legal guardian for children in its custody, as de facto parents, with the right to see children’s records and share them as it sees fit.

But professional organizations including the American Psychological Association, National Social Workers Association, and American Counseling Association say that while it may be legal to share these notes, it’s not ethically defensible. “The idea of going to therapy is not trying to solicit confessions for other uses. Even if your patient is being accused of a crime, you don’t just share your notes,” said Lynn Bufka, a senior director for the American Psychological Association.

Some shelter therapists say they are aware of the policy and take steps to protect children’s privacy by keeping two sets of clinical notes, or by leaving things out entirely. At MercyFirst shelter in New York, for instance, therapists try to protect minors by keeping

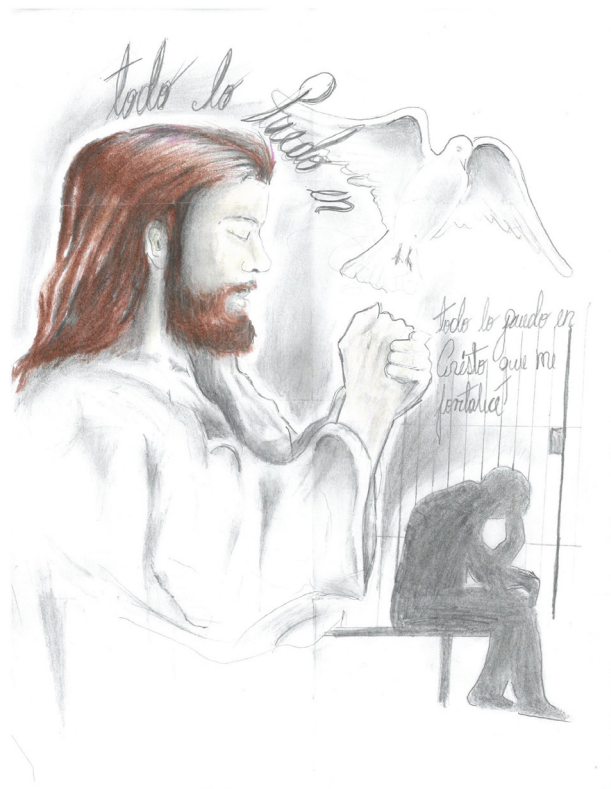
disturbing artwork that might be misunderstood — gory red masks or contorted bodies undergoing violence — out of official files.

But interviews with more than two dozen shelter therapists suggest that most make promises of confidentiality they cannot keep. Claudia Maldonado, lead clinician at the BCFS shelter in Harlingen, Tex., said she tells immigrant children to think of her as their lawyer. At Southwest Key, the largest ORR shelter provider, its regional director of clinical services, Otto Berdiel, said minors are told that everything they disclose will be kept confidential. And at New Hope shelter, Trevino's boss, clinical supervisor Alaina Hinojosa, said she's never heard of a self-disclosure affecting a legal case.

"We let the kids know right away we're not law enforcement," Hinojosa said. "We tell them what they say is going to be confidential, and if we have to say something — if we need to report this — it's not going to influence their case at all."

The effect of all this: the administration has been given a tool that is being used in immigration proceedings around the country. In California, a teenager who had been detained for 11 months confided to shelter staff that he wanted to die; in an asylum hearing, the confession was read aloud as evidence he was a danger to himself and should be deported. In Virginia, a 16-year-old told a shelter therapist that his brother was wanted for murder in El Salvador; the therapist reported that the 16-year-old himself was involved in a murder, and he was transferred that same day to secure detention. In Arizona, a 15-year-old told a therapist he had participated in 50 murders, a number he quickly took back and said had been a boast; nonetheless, he was moved to high-security detention and his asylum case remains under review.

And then there was Kevin. Because of what he'd said in the privacy of a therapy session, ORR sent him in hand and leg shackles



A drawing by Kevin, with text that translates to "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," is just one of the items in his legal file. (Obtained by The Washington Post)

to its highest security facility, Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center in Virginia. When he arrived, he was again put through an intake process that included meeting with a counselor named Andrew Mayles, who explained that based on his disclosures, ORR had identified him as someone who "engaged in violent or malicious behavior." Kevin remembers feeling stunned, like he had been tricked, and crying from frustration. He told Mayles he would not be confiding in him or anyone else. Mayles, who, like Trevino, was still working toward becoming licensed as a therapist, thanked Kevin for his honesty and

promised to work to earn his trust.

"Unaccompanied child expressed frustration with being moved up to a secure placement due to a disclosure to a clinician that he understood to be confidential," read the first note in Kevin's Shenandoah file.

At New Hope, Kevin had been able to watch cars passing from his bedroom window. The shelter had a policy that any child who walked out would be encouraged to return but never physically prevented from leaving. Shenandoah, by contrast, was set up like a prison. It had been built to hold teenagers charged with serious crimes, with few windows at eye level and heavy cell doors with

slots for passing in meals. Fights broke out daily in the gym and common rooms, and guards sometimes strapped biting and spitting detainees to chairs with mesh bags over their heads.

As the months passed, Kevin began to unravel. During the day, he thought constantly of his sister, who he had not spoken with since they were separated at the border. At night, he had flashbacks to the shack by the river and his cousin saying, accusingly, it now seemed, “You are my flesh and blood.” He sometimes tried to quell his feelings by slicing into his wrists with laminated plastic until he drew blood. Shenandoah staff gave him antidepressants and anti-psychotics to help him calm down and sleep. But the pills made him groggy. Concerned, Mayles sent him for a psychological assessment. The results came back: “Kevin right now sits on a precipice, teetering between hope and despair. His trauma has filtered into every single corner of his self.”



Andrew Mayles, Kevin's counselor at Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

The truth was, Kevin was increasingly lonely, and desperate for someone to talk with. And so, despite his initial reluctance, he started confiding in Mayles during their weekly sessions. A former probation officer, Mayles had responded to the center's posting for a clinician because he wanted to work with kids. He brought in carrot cake to share with Kevin

and found Christian praise music for them to listen to together. He arranged the first call between Kevin and his sister since they were separated.

Week by week, Kevin's thinking about therapy changed and he

began looking forward to his meetings with Mayles because the more he opened up, the better he felt. Guided by Mayles's assessment, the government's anti-trafficking program took the extraordinary step of certifying Kevin as a victim of "severe human trafficking," finding that he had been "subjected to involuntary servitude by being forced to work for a gang." The designation gave Kevin the right to all the benefits of a legal refugee, and meant he would be a prime candidate for asylum.

So Kevin kept talking to Mayles, and Mayles kept talking to Kevin, and, as therapists do, he also kept taking notes.

From his notes one day: Kevin "presents less withdrawn and communicates more."

Another day: Kevin told Mayles about feeling humiliated when another boy shoulder-checked him during gym. "He describes being upset with a peer on the unit and nearly hit him with a ball," Mayles wrote.

He grew more comfortable talking to social workers at the center, too. Another day, when Kevin described feeling frustrated and overwhelmed: "Unaccompanied child reported that he often feels like he is going to explode."

Another day: Kevin is "blossoming."

Another day: Kevin turned 18. He had been in custody for 170 days. Teenagers are generally released when they age out of the child shelter system, with the government trusting them to show up for immigration court. But ORR now flagged Kevin's file to ICE, which, instead of releasing him, chose to move him to a different detention center, this one for adults.

“Case notes provided by ORR,” ICE wrote on the form explaining the reasons. “Per case notes, [Kevin] is affiliated with MS-13 in Honduras. [Kevin] was allegedly involved in a plot to kill his cousin. He has gang ties, poses a danger to the community, and is a flight risk.”

* * *

How words spoken in confidence get used and reused

A timeline of how a minor's statements have been cited repeatedly by the U.S. government in its arguments for his detention and deportation

Shortly after Kevin's arrival in the United States, he was required to meet with a social worker and therapist whose notes included the following:

Aug. 18, 2017

[Kevin] reported that he has been having trouble controlling his anger on the unit and often feels like he is going to explode.

Eight months later, those words showed up for the first time in a written filing by Immigration and Customs Enforcement about whether Kevin should be released on bond:

April 25, 2018

The respondent expressed continuous problems with anger in ORR custody including feeling like "he is going to explode."

Two months later, ICE cited the words again in an expanded argument about why Kevin should remain detained:

June 4, 2018

... the respondent expressed challenges controlling his anger in ORR custody, including feeling like "he is going to explode."

A month later, ICE cited the same line in requesting a delay of a judge's order that Kevin be released:

July 20, 2018

The respondent also expressed challenges controlling his anger in ORR custody, including feeling like "he is going to explode."

A year and a half later, ICE cited the notes again in written arguments against a judge's ruling granting Kevin bond for a second time:

Oct. 17, 2019

... the respondent expressed continuous problems with anger in ORR custody including feeling like "he is going to explode."

Two months later, the words showed up again, this time cited by the Justice Department in a filing arguing that Kevin's continued detention is not a violation of his constitutional rights:

Dec. 18, 2019

He reported challenges controlling his anger, and feeling like "he is going to explode."

The place he was sent is a privately owned facility in rural Virginia, an hour's drive from the nearest city. Opened a decade ago, it houses some 700 immigration detainees, all in different stages of fighting deportation. Kevin was among the youngest ones when he arrived and nearly as skinny as he had been in Honduras. He slept on a bunk bed in a room with 100 other men, with the lights always on and little privacy, not even doors on the toilet stalls. He was scared of his fellow medium-high-security detainees. He had lost contact with his sister, who had been deported, and with Mayles, who he tried to call but could never reach. After five months, he was at last scheduled for a bond hearing; a chance to ask to be released until his request for asylum was settled.

It's not easy for an 18-year-old with no family in the United States to find a lawyer, and Kevin felt grateful to be represented by a group of students from Washington and Lee University's law school, who would be earning extra school credits for volunteering to take on his case. The students were so nervous at their first court appearance that Perlman, the judge, led them in a relaxation exercise. "Take a deep breath. Deep, cleansing yoga breath," she told them.

Kevin watched his bond hearing from a cell outfitted with a camera and TV screen because the government had opted not to have him attend the hearing in person. For 15 minutes, he listened to his lawyers argue that he should be let out, noting that he was a certified trafficking victim and had a perfect disciplinary record in ICE custody. "In spite of suffering a truly horrific childhood, he's still a thoughtful and kind person," they summed up. "He is not a danger to the community."

Then it was ICE's turn, and Kevin watched as the ICE attorney handed Perlman a copy of the notes Trevino had signed, turned to the camera and asked, "Do you remember when you were in ORR

custody, speaking to some people about your time with the gang?”

With a sinking feeling, Kevin said he remembered.

“You witnessed the ‘torture and killing’ of victims, right? And eventually became a full member of the gang?” the attorney continued, quoting directly from the report.

Kevin wanted to cry. But he steadied his voice and tried to explain that he’d never been a willing participant. “I wasn’t a full member,” he said, after a long pause. “I refused to do certain acts; that’s why I came to this country.”

The attorney went back to the New Hope report. “Okay, and you also sold drugs for MS-13? And you did that for a year and a half?”

Kevin acknowledged that he had.

“Okay, so you mentioned that at age 16, your responsibility was to be a lookout?” the attorney asked, quoting the word lookout from the report.

“I was forced to, yes,” Kevin said.

“And that your involvement in the gang included ‘physically assaulting victims?’ ”

“Yes,” Kevin said. “I was forced to commit those kinds of acts.”

“You witnessed ‘dismemberment of body parts?’ ” the attorney asked.

There was a pause.

“Yes,” Kevin said.

Twenty minutes later, the attorney was done and, as the hearing came to an end, Kevin was so convinced it had gone horribly, he didn’t understand at first when Perlman turned to the screen and said, “I am granting bond in your case.” She noted in her ruling that he had been put in a secure facility in the first place “only because of his disclosures to a counselor.” And she said she hoped Kevin would thrive in the United States. “You’ve certainly been through a lot,” she said.

It took Kevin a moment to process what had just happened, that he was going to be released. He had now been in custody for 329 days.

“Gracias por darme la oportunidad,” he said to Perlman — Thank you for giving me this opportunity. But before the hearing ended, ICE indicated it would be filing for an emergency hold on Perlman’s order, and instead of being freed, Kevin went back to his bunk while ICE assembled an appeal.

Six months later, he was still waiting for a decision on the ICE appeal when he got another chance to be freed, this time at a hearing on his asylum claim itself. Once again, the lawyers gathered in Perlman’s courtroom. Once again, Kevin watched from a detention cell and answered questions about his past with the gang, and felt a rush of gratitude when Perlman granted him asylum, followed by a crush of disappointment when ICE said it would file an immediate appeal.

For ICE, which said in a statement that it “regularly requests and receives documents from ORR” and has pursued Kevin’s case so strenuously “to ensure a public safety threat is not released into the community,” there was little question about using therapy notes. James Rust, an attorney who was part of the team arguing against

Kevin, said any ethical considerations lay with ORR rather than ICE. He said he would never have known about Kevin's disclosures had that agency not shared them. "We would have had no idea," he said, adding that once he learned about Kevin's past, he felt compelled to use the information. "If a kid has disclosed some kind of criminal activity, I err on the side of 'this needs to be raised with the immigration judge,'" he said.

It wasn't just Perlman now who was evaluating Kevin, though, it was a new set of people, all members of the Justice Department's Board of Immigration Appeals, whose rulings would be guided by the interpretations and reinterpretations of what was in Kevin's file:

"The respondent appeared to personally benefit, as he stated to ORR staff that he made a 'profit/percentage of the sale' of these drugs," ICE wrote, citing notes from New Hope.

"The respondent expressed challenges controlling his anger in ORR custody, including feeling like 'he is going to explode,'" ICE wrote, citing notes from Shenandoah.

"The respondent was so upset with a fellow resident that he almost hit him with a ball over a conflict and went to 'cool down.'" ICE wrote.

Again and again in its filings, ICE cited versions of what Kevin had confided, especially the report signed by Trevino, who said through a shelter spokesperson that she did not know her reports would be used against clients. Mayles, who said in an interview that he didn't know, either, has since left Shenandoah. He said he grew disillusioned with what he saw as a "fear-based" push to keep children detained on shaky allegations of dangerousness. Offered a chance to review how ICE had cited Kevin's Shenandoah records, he declined. "It would sicken me," he said.

Determined not to make any more disclosures as he waited for the appeals board to rule, Kevin went days without speaking with anyone. He continued to wait through the spring and summer of 2019, when there was a mumps outbreak at the detention center, a quarantine, a hunger strike and a crackdown by guards. In August 2019, the appeals board's decision came down: Perlman would need to rule again on asylum and put more weight on the fact that Kevin "sold illegal drugs on behalf of the criminal gang." In September, Perlman was telling Kevin, "I'm going to take a very short amount of time to look at the documents, and then I'm going to issue a decision." And in February 2020, still waiting as he now passed 950 days in detention, Kevin began thinking that he might just give up and self-deport, even if it meant going back to a place he'd been followed out of by text messages saying if he ever returned he would be killed.

* * *

Sometimes, Kevin now finds himself thinking back to the first day he crossed the border — ill from the journey, lost in the Texas scrub, but relieved he'd finally reached the United States. Then he thinks about what he's seen since of the country, which has amounted to glimpses out a van window while being moved between detention centers.

Wide, clean roads. Buildings taller than any he had seen in Honduras. Open fields. Dense stands of trees. He especially admires the sturdy homes on the sides of the highways, and says that he has never seen a house that wasn't beautiful. That's all he knows of the United States, he says, other than the insides of three detention centers, the video feed from Helaine Perlman's courtroom and whatever news he gets from his student lawyers, the only people who visit him.



Kevin has an emotional moment in December 2019, after some 900 days in detention at three detention centers. After hearing statements he made to counselors — that he thought were confidential — read back to him at hearings, he chooses his words more carefully now. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

“And how are things here?” one of those lawyers, Erick Resek, said to him in Spanish one day after driving two hours from the Washington and Lee campus then being cleared through four sets of security doors. “What are your plans for when you get out?”

“Sometimes I don’t like to talk about them, in case they don’t happen,” Kevin said. He was wearing a short-sleeved green jumpsuit and hugging himself against the chill in the room. “But I know there are big opportunities here.”

“The most likely thing is when you get out of here, you’ll be working in a restaurant at first,” Resek said. He mentioned someone will-

ing to sponsor him who lived in Charlottesville, adding, "In Charlottesville, there are a few Honduran restaurants."

"I miss all that food," Kevin said. "Here, we just eat pasta. Well, twice a week, we get fried chicken. But even that, with pasta. They never skip the pasta."

"Do they put sauce on it at least?" Resek asked.

"Not really. It's just the noodles," Kevin said.

"Horrible," Resek said. "What food did you like before you came here? Like if you had to choose a last supper?"

"Roast chicken. And my favorite was — do you know what encurtido is?" Kevin said. "It's like a whole fish, in this special sauce, with pickled vegetables."

"They don't serve fish here?" Resek asked.

"I've never seen a fish dead or alive in this country. Only on TV," Kevin said.

"The important thing is to stay distracted," Resek said.

"It's important not to get desperate," Kevin said, "but sometimes it feels impossible."

The two had been having versions of this conversation for months, always in this same small room with just enough space for a few plastic chairs, their knees almost touching as they talked about soccer, about God, about stray cats in Resek's neighborhood, about anything at all to pass time as Kevin waited. But now, after a bit of quiet, Kevin said something different, almost confessional.

“Lately, I have a lot of feelings,” he said.

He looked down. He was on the verge of crying. He picked at the fabric of his jumpsuit. He mentioned the name of someone who worked at the detention center, a staff psychologist, and then said he’d gotten so lonely recently that he’d gone to see her.

“But did you tell her anything?” Resek asked, trying not to show the alarm he was feeling.

“No,” Kevin said. “No.”

“Did you feel like it helped?” Resek asked. “Would you want to do more of it?”

Kevin wiped at his eyes. He was no longer naive, no longer frightened, and no longer younger. He was 19 years old now and utterly alone.

“I would.”

Julie Tate contributed to this report.

National

Bill would end practice of using confidential therapy notes against detained immigrant children

By Hannah Dreier

<https://wapo.st/3sl4GNz>

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Kevin Euceda, an immigrant from Honduras, has spent more than 1,000 days in U.S. custody. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

Seeking to end a practice that one senator called a “profound betrayal of trust,” legislation was introduced Wednesday in the Senate and House of Representatives to stop the Trump administration from using confidential therapy notes against immigrant children in detention and deportation proceedings. The legislation is one of several efforts underway to protect the confidentiality of young

asylum seekers launched after The Washington Post reported that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has been regularly using notes from therapy sessions against unaccompanied minors, often without the consent of the therapists involved, and always without the consent of the minors themselves.

The Post story focused on the saga of Kevin Euceda, a Honduran who was 17 when he arrived in the United States in 2017 and was placed in a shelter for immigrant children. In a required meeting with a therapist, he disclosed that he had been forcibly recruited into a gang when he was 12 years old. He thought the session was confidential, but his words were soon shared with ICE and have been used in repeated court hearings to argue for his detention and deportation. He has been detained for nearly three years. Last week, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which oversees the agency in charge of immigrant-child shelters, said what happened to Euceda “shouldn’t be happening” going forward, even as ICE took a step that will keep Euceda in detention indefinitely.

Professional mental-health organizations demanded an immediate stop to the information sharing after it was brought to light. Last week, 41 national organizations signed a joint letter to Congress calling for oversight hearings on the practice, which is part of the Trump administration’s stepped-up immigration enforcement strategy. The American Psychological Association said the practice constituted an “appalling” breach of privacy, and wrote to HHS and ICE calling it “a violation of broadly accepted mental health ethical standards.” The National Association of Social Workers said it was “an affront to this country’s basic principles” of civil rights protections. The American Counseling Association warned that therapists risk their licenses by participating in “an abhorrent violation” of confidentiality. The American Academy of Pediatrics also denounced it.

Many government-funded shelters are not waiting on congressional action to add protections for minors in their care. Among them is the Children's Village shelter in Upstate New York, whose president, Jeremy Kohomban, said he was "stunned" to learn about the information sharing and immediately began retraining staff. BCFS in Texas, the country's second-largest HHS shelter provider, has created a script for therapists to follow, which includes the line, "It is important for you to understand that not everything you tell me is confidential." HHS contractor Bethany Christian Services said it was "saddened" to learn of the practice, and is retraining therapists to explain to children that their records will be shared.

At the McAllen, Tex., shelter where Euceda was first held, therapists are no longer telling children their sessions will be confidential, according to a spokesperson. The therapist who signed the report that ICE used against Euceda and has now resigned said through the spokesperson that she had not known her notes could be shared outside of HHS.

During congressional committee hearings last week, HHS Secretary Alex Azar said the administration is no longer turning over full clinical files to ICE.

"It was a mistake, we fixed it, and on a going forward basis it shouldn't be happening," he said under questioning. In addition to sometimes sharing children's complete files, HHS quietly added a requirement to its public handbook for immigrant-child shelters in 2018, stating that if a minor mentions anything having to do with gangs or drug-dealing, therapists must file a report to be passed to ICE within one day. Azar said the reporting requirement still stands, but therapists will now report only broad outlines of children's disclosures, and full notes will not be shared "absent the child's consent."

This week, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) wrote to HHS and ICE saying that “vulnerable, traumatized children” cannot give meaningful consent. Separately, a dozen senators sent a letter to HHS in which they called Euceda’s experience “astonishing,” and said at minimum, “therapists must stop falsely assuring immigrant children” that they have doctor-patient confidentiality.

On Wednesday, Democrats introduced legislation that would end the information sharing entirely. The bills, sponsored by Rep. Grace F. Napolitano (D-Calif.) in the House and Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) in the Senate, would ban HHS from sharing therapy disclosures with ICE to be used in detention or deportation proceedings. ICE would also be banned from requesting this information. “There is a fact finding process for asylum claims. Don’t inflict further trauma by lying to a refugee and violating their trust,” Merkley said.

Also Wednesday, Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.), along with 22 other senators, formally requested an inspector general investigation into how the Trump administration was able to share this information in the first place.

Amid the new attention on the case, a federal immigration judge granted Euceda protection against deportation, and ICE immediately appealed. It was the fourth time ICE has appealed an order that could have granted Euceda freedom. Judge Helaine Perlman ruled that under the 1987 United Nations Convention Against Torture, Euceda cannot be deported because if he is returned to Honduras, “it is more likely than not that the respondent would be delivered to MS-13 and subsequently be killed.” The Central American gang MS-13 took over Euceda’s house when he was 12 and forced him to run errands and sell drugs. Euceda said in court testimony he fled when the gang ordered him to commit a murder, and in 2017, HHS certified him as a human-trafficking victim. ICE

declined to comment on why it appealed the judge's ruling, citing ongoing litigation.

Euceda, now 20, will remain detained in rural Virginia as he awaits a decision on the appeal, which is likely to be many months away. Supporters from around the country have offered to visit him, talk to him on the phone, and send him care packages. Local psychologists have also come forward to offer therapy sessions that would truly be confidential.

"It's a lot to take in," Euceda said, speaking by phone Tuesday from the detention center for adult ICE detainees that he'd been transferred to on his 18th birthday. He said he is keeping the letters from readers folded up beneath his mattress and has read some to the point of memorization. "These notes have made me feel so good. They're going to be my most valuable keepsakes when I'm out of this place," he said.

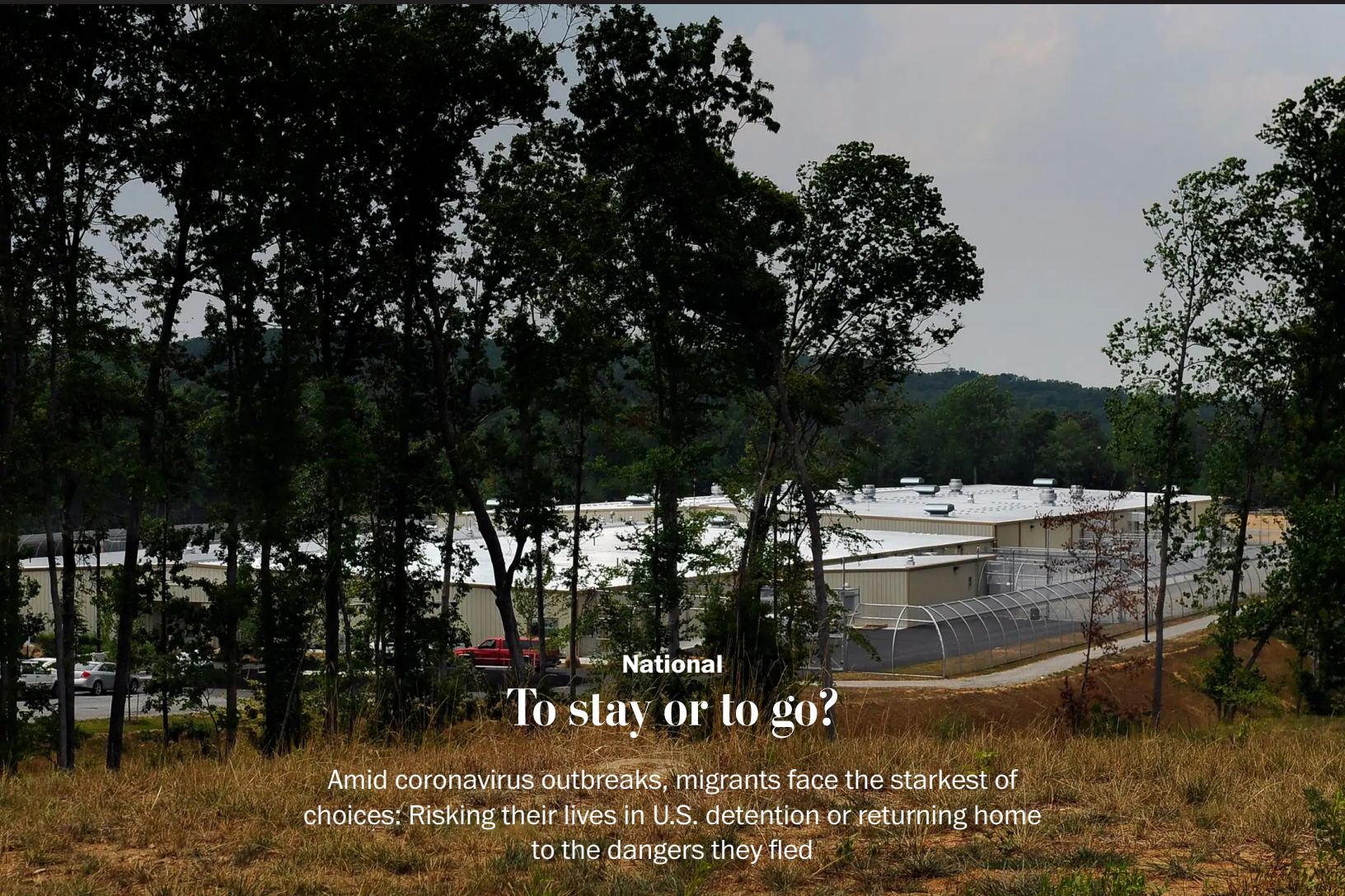
The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

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National To stay or to go?

Amid coronavirus outbreaks, migrants face the starkest of choices: Risking their lives in U.S. detention or returning home to the dangers they fled

by Hannah Dreier

Kevin Euceda believed he was in imminent danger.

Down the hall in the immigration detention center where he was being held, a man whose psychiatric visits had been suspended because of the pandemic was hallucinating and screaming. Others were shivering and sweating, scared they were going to die. Surrounded by so much sickness, Kevin was growing desperate to find a way out.

A migrant who said he came to the United States when he was 17 years old to escape gang threats in Honduras, Kevin had been living for nearly three years in a place that was now being overrun by covid-19.

And so, last summer, after he was taken in shackles for his daily hour of outside time, he asked for a phone to be passed into his cell and called the pro bono legal clinic that had taken on his case in 2017, when it appeared that he was about to be granted asylum and freed. The lawyer who spoke to him that day remembered his voice sounding shaky, his words coming too fast to understand.

“Whatever you can do to get me out of here, please make it happen,” Kevin said.

The lawyer promised to call a deportation officer, the very person who for three years, Kevin, now 20, had been trying to avoid.

In detention centers around the country, more and more people have been asking for the same thing, seeking their own deportation as the novel coronavirus has spread through facilities and sickened more than 8,000 detainees, according to government data.

The virus has collided with the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” approach toward people looking for refuge and asylum in the United States. Those policies have led to a record number of immigrants being held in detention, including 7,000 people who had cleared the first steps of requesting asylum when the pandemic began and would normally have been released on bond while their cases were processed.

Some immigrants have been withdrawing cases against their lawyers’ advice, saying they’re more afraid of being in detention during a coronavirus outbreak than of what might be waiting in the places

they fled. More than 2,500 detainees, most with no serious criminal history, have given up their cases since March, according to records from the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, a research group at Syracuse University. Those records also show that detainees put in deportation proceedings in July 2020 were twice as likely to opt for voluntary departure than those from a year before.

During 32 months at the Farmville detention center in Virginia, Kevin had held on through threats from dorm mates, protests about conditions that ended in guards using pepper spray, an outbreak of mumps and long periods of isolation. Again and again, his lawyers had assured him that his claim for asylum was a sound one and that, eventually, he was likely to win release. But now he explained to them that even when he had been targeted for death by gang members back in Honduras, he had at least been able to flee the country. At the detention center, he felt there was nothing he could do to escape the virus. "I've never been this scared," he said.



Kevin Euceda, an asylum seeker from Honduras, in detention at Farmville. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)

Kevin had been living with different forms of danger for most of his life. He had been raised by a grandmother who attacked him when she drank and left him with a V-shaped scar on his forehead. She died when he was 12, and the gang MS-13 took over the house where they had been living, which was little more than a shack. Gang members slept in Kevin's bed, tortured rivals on the patio, and put him to work selling drugs, he would later say in sworn testimony that was found credible by an immigration judge and also accepted by the government. One night, the leaders forced him to watch as they murdered his cousin for refusing to join the gang. Eventually, in 2017, they told Kevin he had to kill a stranger to prove his loyalty, and he fled to the United States to seek asylum.

After he crossed the Rio Grande on an inflatable raft, Kevin was processed by Border Patrol and sent to a shelter for migrant children. There, as documented earlier this year by The Washington Post, he went through an intake process that included a mandatory mental health therapy session. He told the therapist that he had fled MS-13 and that gang leaders had ordered him killed if he returned. The therapist assured him that their session was confidential, but, because of a new Trump administration policy, her notes were instead shared with Immigration and Customs Enforcement to be used in court proceedings about whether Kevin would be allowed to stay in the United States.

Lawyers for ICE, who argued that Kevin was a threat to the community and should be deported, cited these notes some half a dozen times to keep him from being released as he was moved through shelters and detention centers, ending with his transfer to Farmville, in a rural part of central Virginia.

Twice, a judge ordered Kevin released on bond, and twice ICE appealed. Kevin also was certified as a victim of forced labor and granted asylum. But ICE appealed that ruling, too, and also

appealed after a judge granted Kevin protection from deportation under the United Nations Convention against Torture, finding that he would not be safe anywhere in Central America because of widespread MS-13 control and police corruption.

As a result of what the American Psychological Association would later call an “appalling” breach of the right to patient confidentiality, Kevin was still waiting in detention for his case to be settled when the novel coronavirus began to spread through the country.

He was living in a dorm of 100 men, with tables in one corner for meals and toilet cubicles without doors in another. At night, they slept head-to-head on beds bolted flush with each other, close enough to smell each other’s breath, “like husband and wife,” one detainee said.

Kevin’s one connection to the outside world was a shared computer he could use to text with students at Washington and Lee University’s law school, who earned class credits for taking on his case.

“We’re in a very, very strong position,” one of the students, Erick Resek, wrote in March, updating Kevin on their strategy to get him permanent asylum.

“Okay, I’ll keep holding on here,” Kevin wrote back, in correspondence the legal team shared with his permission.

“Are you in quarantine?” Resek wrote.

“Quarantine?” Kevin wrote.

“I mean, is Farmville in quarantine yet? Outside, the whole country is in quarantine,” Resek wrote.

“Umm no, we’re not in quarantine at all here,” Kevin wrote.

“Hmm, that’s weird. The whole country is in a total panic,” Resek wrote.

Even as Resek gave Kevin reason for optimism about his case, he was careful to explain that a final ruling was likely to be many months away.

“What if this coronavirus thing lasts for a long time?” Kevin wrote, adding a frowning emoji. “Imagine if the virus got in here. I think we’d all die.”

Three months later, the virus arrived at Farmville when 74 detainees were transferred there from detention centers in Arizona and Florida. It happened in early June, a time in the pandemic when different agencies in charge of prison inmates and immigration detainees were developing different ways of dealing with viral spread. In the federal prison system, for instance, inmate transfers between institutions had been put on hold because of concerns about infection. But ICE was operating with limited restrictions at that point, which allowed a transfer to take place that, as The Post reported, was driven in large part by the Trump administration’s desire to bring federal agents in from other parts of the country to quell anti-racism protests in D.C. ICE agents are not allowed to travel on charter flights unless detainees also are aboard, so, to expedite the agents’ travel to the protests, the transfer was arranged to bring a group of detainees to Farmville, the ICE facility closest to the nation’s capital.

When the detainees arrived on June 2, at least two were feverish. Farmville initially housed the new detainees in separate dorms but then moved several of them into the general population, where they mixed with the 400 other men.

“We were touching their shoes, touching their clothes,” recalled a detainee named Sarafin Saragoza, a 36-year-old from Mexico who earned \$1 a day for helping distribute uniforms. “There was no way to keep distance from them.”

Within weeks, 51 of the new arrivals tested positive for the virus, and whole dorm rooms began falling ill.



LEFT: An undated image taken from video and edited by the government to protect the identities of detainees shows the inside of the Farmville center in Virginia where foreign nationals in custody sleep in bunks bolted flush with each other. (ICE Public Affairs) RIGHT: An image from video shows closely ranked bunks in a dorm that houses up to 100 detainees.

Among the first to get sick was Gerson Garcia, a 27-year-old asylum seeker from Honduras. He wrote, “I need to see the doctor” on a sick-call request form and dropped it into a box that was supposed to be checked daily. He was still waiting to see the doctor 10 days later and crying about body aches, when, medical records show, three guards lifted him down from his bed and took him to the center’s clinic.

After that, he was moved to a medical room where there was already another sick detainee. His fever spiked to 103. He lost 30 pounds because of diarrhea. He and the other man remem-

ber a night when Garcia felt he couldn't breathe and pounded on the door until he was too dizzy to stand. "I was begging for help. Finally, the guard came and said there was no doctor at night and he would punish me if I kept banging," Garcia said. That's when he decided to ask for deportation.

Another detainee who fell ill was Frank Bauer, who is 39 and moved to the United States from Bolivia as a child. "My lungs hurt," he wrote in one of a series of near-daily requests for medical attention. "I still haven't seen a doctor," he wrote on another. "Please help us — we need medication," he wrote on another, because Farmville does not provide any medicine, even Tylenol, without a prescription. Then he wrote, "We don't have any more sick call request forms in this dorm," on the last form he could find. He, too, decided to ask for deportation.

Some detainees later sued the company that runs Farmville, Immigration Centers of America (ICA), accusing it of failing to protect their health and safety. In a sworn statement submitted in response to that lawsuit, Farmville director Jeffrey Crawford said he tried to slow the outbreak by giving everyone masks, instituting daily temperature checks and distributing hand sanitizer. ICA also posted signs encouraging social distancing, though investigators from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention later found that the layout of the dorms, with beds inches apart, made viral spread "difficult to mitigate."

Asked to comment for this story, ICA said in a statement that it was unable to answer questions "due to pending litigation." The response continued that ICA has "worked hard" to "adhere to the continuously evolving science and medical recommendations from our local, state and federal health authorities."

By the third week of June, dozens of people in Kevin's room were sick. Their coughs echoed through the dorm at night, mixed, some remembered, with the quieter sounds of crying.

Kevin had learned as a child to keep to himself to avoid trouble. He was so polite with the guards that some detainees suspected he might be an informant. But it felt like he was running out of ways to stay safe.

"There are 27 cases of coronavirus here now," he wrote in a text message to a recent law school graduate, Hollie Webb, who had represented him when she was a student.

"Wow, please be careful," Webb wrote back.

"Yes, of course, I'm trying," he wrote.

Farmville had nine medical isolation rooms for nearly 500 men, so most sick detainees had to stay in the dorms, where they were required to stand in front of their beds to be counted each morning. Saragoza, who had helped book in the transfers and was now sick himself, watched one day as his dorm mate passed out. "He fell straight on his face and his head bounced like a basketball," he said.

There were multiple episodes of fainting, according to interviews with detainees. One man collapsed while waiting in line to see a nurse. Another while taking a shower. Another while walking back to his bed with a blanket around his shoulders. In his statement, Crawford acknowledged that in one dorm, six detainees had passed out over a single weekend.

ICA subcontracts medical care to a company called Armor Correctional Health Services, which has had several government contracts canceled because of recurring complaints that staffers ignore sick

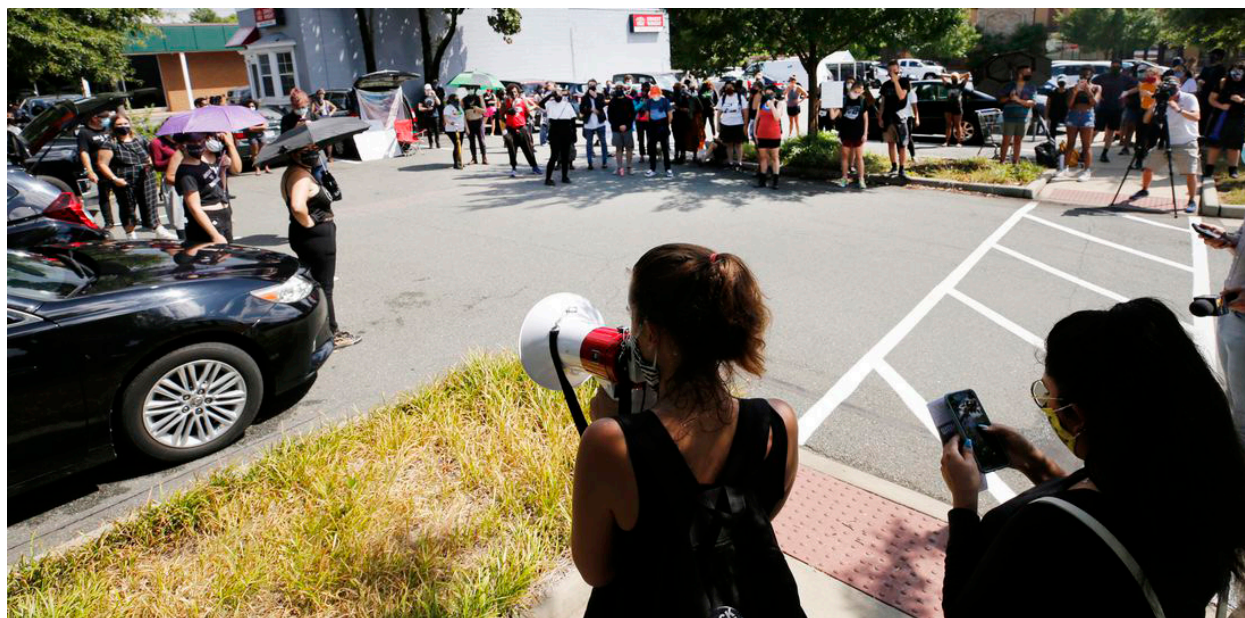
inmates. In 2018, Armor was criminally charged with falsifying records to give the appearance that staffers had been checking on a man as he died of dehydration in his cell. In other instances, Armor has hired medical staff with disciplinary records, including the sole doctor at Farmville, Teresa Moore, who had been reprimanded twice by the state medical board, and also had her license restricted, for overprescribing narcotics and misusing her prescription pad.

Citing pending litigation, Armor declined to answer specific questions for this story. In a statement, the company said that it has followed CDC and Virginia Department of Health guidelines for combating coronavirus spread. “We will continue to enhance our plan as new facts about the pandemic materialize,” the company said. Armor also addressed the ongoing criminal case about falsifying records, and said in a statement that its employees’ actions did not reflect a company policy and “the charges filed do not involve any allegations of misconduct or negligent supervision against Armor management.”

Farmville does not track sick-call response times, but a nurse named Jackie Rothwell said the center struggled with an unmanageable caseload after the June 2 transfer. “Most of the staff had never dealt with actual acute care, and the stipulations for care greatly overwhelmed the staff,” said Rothwell, adding that she retired this summer because she felt unsafe.

On June 18, Kevin made contact with Webb again.

“There are 38 people infected with the virus now,” he wrote. “It’s getting crazy.”



TOP: Brenda Pereira addresses a protest in Richmond on July 31, 2020, over the treatment of detainees at Farmville and other Immigration and Customs Enforcement holding centers. (Joe Mahoney/Richmond Times-Dispatch) BOTTOM LEFT: The crowd at the July 31 demonstration in Richmond against the treatment of detainees in ICE custody. (Joe Mahoney/Richmond Times-Dispatch) BOTTOM RIGHT: Brenda Pereira leads the July 31 protest in Richmond. (Joe Mahoney/Richmond Times-Dispatch)

Soon, detainees started protesting the conditions at Farmville. They refused to stand for count and stopped eating meals. They told guards they needed Tylenol for their fevers and wanted the bunkmates who were coughing in their faces to be moved.

The guards also were becoming jumpy. More than two dozen had gotten sick, and some were quitting. “We were all terrified,” said a guard who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he still

works for ICA. Another worker said supervisors were asking guards to come in if they had tested positive for the virus but were asymptomatic, because the center was so short-staffed. Crawford said in his statement that ICA directed its staff to “stay home with any sign of any illness.” A CDC assessment would later find that people were working through nausea, diarrhea and breathlessness.

As the protests continued and grew, guards began responding with pepper spray, which can make the respiratory tract more susceptible to infection. On July 1, guards used several cans of spray after detainees decided not to stand for count, according to Crawford’s statement. One of the men in the room was a 72-year-old Canadian doctor named James Hill, who was in Farmville awaiting deportation after serving a prison sentence for inappropriately prescribing narcotics. Hill began coughing uncontrollably, according to his family and bunkmate, and was taken to the hospital with shortness of breath. He died a month later on a ventilator.

The detainees in Kevin’s dorm decided to sit on their beds instead of standing for count as required after three people were taken away in wheelchairs. That afternoon, the men refused to eat lunch or dinner, and Kevin texted Webb that he was worried about what might happen next.

“People here are losing it and trying to protest,” he wrote. “They’ve locked us all in, and the guards don’t want to come give us any explanations. I think it’s going to get really ugly.”

In the evening, guards in body armor entered the dorm, according to Crawford’s statement. One fired a weapon that made a loud bang and sent everyone running.

The guards pulled Kevin and several others out and led them to a row of cells deep inside the detention center. Kevin sounded pan-

icked when he called the professor supervising his case to report that he was being punished with 30 days in solitary confinement.

“How did you get in there?” the professor asked.

“I have horrible luck,” Kevin said, and explained that he had been lumped in with the protest leaders for, as he put it, “asking questions” when the riot squad came in.

Farmville ranks among the top 10 ICE detention centers nationwide for its use of solitary confinement, according to the nonprofit Project on Government Oversight. ICA declined to release Kevin’s discipline record, so his lawyers never knew why he was being punished.

With no natural light in his cell, Kevin began to tell time by the arrival of his three daily meals. He was allowed out once a day, shortly before dawn, to stand in an open-air cage for an hour. Men in the other cells passed time by shouting back and forth about their symptoms. Kevin rarely spoke, but he was getting sick, too. He told a nurse that he had a bad headache, chills and a sore throat. The other detainees sometimes noticed that his eyes were red and wondered if he had been crying.

“I’m in the hole and I hate it,” he wrote to Webb. “The conditions have gotten so hard. Everything is worse.”

By July 9, ICA had tested 286 detainees, and 267 were positive for the coronavirus. The center’s nursing director alerted the health department in an email, writing, “Dr. Moore said good news is that’s almost the whole facility, so can’t go over that much.”

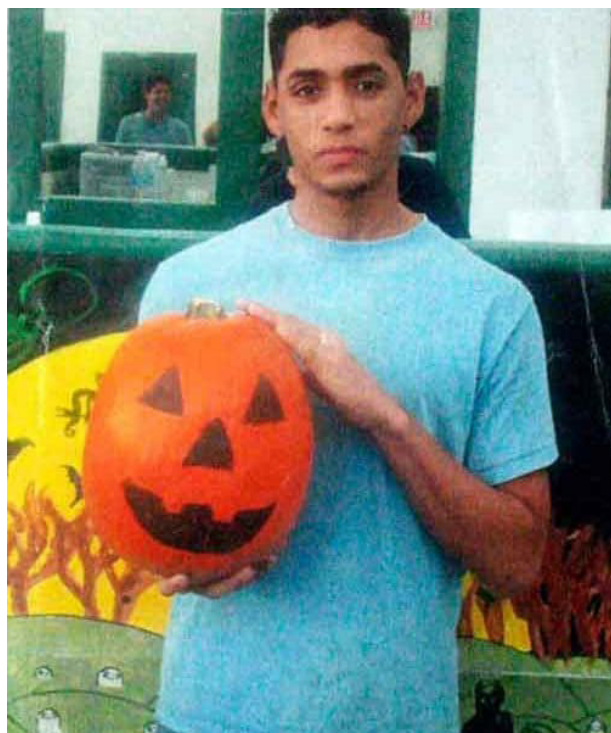
Kevin was tested July 2. “They gave me a covid 19 test today and it was horrible, ha-ha,” he wrote to Webb. The next week, a notation went into his medical chart: “Positive covid result.” But it’s

unclear whether Kevin was ever told. His lawyers think he was not informed, because he never mentioned getting his results and continued to call them frantic with worry. After years of arguing for his release into the United States, his lawyers began contacting his deportation officer daily, along with any other official they could think of, asking for Kevin to be removed from Farmville.

For Kevin's part, he wanted out as quickly as possible. "Life has dealt me a lot of blows, a lot of suffering, and it's sapped my strength and my will to fight," he wrote to Webb. He told her he hoped to be deported before serving his full 30 days in solitary confinement.



Kevin Euceda stands in front of a "welcome" sign at a party his sister threw for him the day he arrived in Guatemala. (Family photo)



LEFT: Kevin takes a picture of himself on his first day back in Honduras after being deported from the United States. (Family photo) RIGHT: Kevin in immigration detention several months after entering the United States and requesting asylum. (Family photo)

Kevin wasn't the only one who decided that returning to a dangerous place would be better than staying at Farmville. More than a dozen detainees said in interviews that they chose to give up their cases during the outbreak.

Bauer, the man who filed daily sick requests, asked for deportation without telling his wife or U.S.-citizen children, for fear they would try to persuade him to stay in a center where ultimately 339 detainees caught the virus. Now trying to recover from lingering symptoms in Bolivia, he wrote to a judge before being deported that he was abandoning his case because "after contracting covid-19 due to ICE and facility negligence, I fear for my life in this facility."

A 22-year-old named Zack, who asked that his last name be withheld for his safety, had been seeking asylum because he was a gay man in a North African country where homosexuality is illegal.

After being sent to solitary for inciting a hunger strike, he said he struggled to get care for covid symptoms. At one point, he tried covering the camera in his cell with wet toilet paper to attract help, he said, “but still no one came. Then, out of nowhere, the guard opened the slot in the door and pepper-sprayed me.” After a month, he gave up his case. He was assaulted within days of being deported, he said, and is now hiding in a third country from relatives who have threatened to kill him for shaming the family.

A man named Jose Rauda, who also was put in solitary confinement for protesting conditions, decided to request deportation soon after being removed from his dorm. He was killed in El Salvador two weeks after arriving back, according to his mother, by MS-13 members who thought he belonged to a rival gang.

The Farmville outbreak ended in August after the virus infected nearly everyone held there and a federal judge barred ICA from accepting new detainees. Recently, fewer Farmville detainees have been giving up their claims, especially as lawyers advise clients that the next administration is likely to roll back much of Trump’s immigration agenda, dramatically improving their odds of winning legal status and being released while they wait for an outcome.

It is advice Kevin never got to hear. At the end of July, his request for deportation was granted and he was flown back to Honduras in shackles. It was nighttime when he walked out of the airport, and Webb remembers him calling in tears to say how overwhelming it felt to see the stars for the first time in three years. Two days later, he crossed the border into Guatemala, where his 21-year-old sister was living. The gang MS-13 operates in Guatemala as well, but Kevin thought he could hide there, at least for a while.

His sister, who asked that her name not be used because she, too, fears being targeted by the gang, set up an extra bed in her rented

room and threw Kevin a party with a cake and the fried fish he had been missing in detention. He continued to wake up before dawn as he had at Farmville, and got a job working at a grocery for \$5 a day.

After a childhood spent in forced labor for gang leaders and an early adulthood spent in detention, Kevin began trying to live out some of his earlier daydreams. He adopted a stray cat. He bought a used motorcycle. He also started rebuilding a relationship with his mother, who had left him as a small child. He told her he forgave her and pledged to help support her in the coming years. Everyone was struck by how focused and confident the tall 20-year-old seemed. “He was scared that something might happen to him, but he was so happy,” his sister said.

After a few weeks, Kevin took a day off work to visit a river with his sister — he on his motorcycle, and she riding with a friend. When they got there, the water looked like it was moving too fast for swimming, so they leaned on a bridge and watched it pass. On the way back, his sister lost track of Kevin on the curving highway. When she caught up, he was sprawled on the side of the road, unconscious.

It wasn’t clear whether Kevin had had an accident or been attacked. No witnesses came forward. After an ambulance took him to the hospital, police claimed Kevin’s motorcycle as evidence, and the family says that was the last they heard about the case.

“We’ll never know what happened,” his mother, Erika Euceda, said. “There are lots of people who try to rob motorcycles here. Lots of people who make threats. Or watch people who have just been deported. But the police didn’t try to find any answers.”

At the hospital, doctors said Kevin needed to be sent to a bigger city for surgery. His sister was trying to find the money to have him

moved when he suffered a massive brain hemorrhage. The doctors said there was nothing to be done, and so it was that three years after he was a 17-year-old asking for protection in the United States, two years after he was first granted asylum, and four weeks after he returned to Central America, Kevin Euceda died and was in danger no more.

Steven Rich contributed to this report.



Kevin at Farmville in December 2019. (Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post)