NY congressman talks ICE facility conditions

Latimer toured site a day before detainee's death

Chris McKenna New York State Team | USA TODAY NETWORK

Just a day before a high-profile death in a federal detention center in New Jersey, New York U.S. Rep. George Latimer had walked the corridors of that very facility to see firsthand how immigrant detainees are treated in Delaney Hall. • The West chester County Democrat had arranged his visit a couple weeks earlier to exercise the same oversight role other Congress members have played at the Newark facility. It just so happened his hour-long tour with fellow New York Rep. Ritchie Torres on July 31 came shortly before Edwin Lopez-Cornejo's death — the second at Delaney Hall in eight months — thrust the 1,000-bed detention center back into the spotlight.

In an interview with USA TODAY Network on Wednesday, Aug. 5, to recount his trip, Latimer said the tour reinforced his view that Delaney Hall and every other detention center used by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement should be closed.

Not because he saw anyone being mistreated while he and Torres were escorted through the dormitorystyle living areas. But because what we he observed was, in his view, an immoral and dehumanizing warehousing of people whose only offenses may have been living in the U.S. without proper authorization.



U.S. Rep. George Latimer, in an interview on Aug. 5, recounts his visit to Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey, on July 31, one day before a second detained man died in that federal immigration detention center. CHRIS MCKENNA/NEW YORK STATE TEAM

“My analogy is, I was in an Amazon distribution warehouse,” Latimer said. “And instead of boxes, I was looking at human beings. Human beings who had been moved there temporarily before being sent someplace else. There was nothing about it that, to me, respected the humanity of the individual.”

Details of Delaney Hall detainee’s death one day after Latimer tour

Lopez-Cornejo had been held at Delaney Hall for six weeks when he died on Aug. 1. Federal authorities say he was arrested in Plainfield, New Jersey, on June18 for being in the country illegally — he first came to the U.S. from El Salvador 20 years earlier — and was awaiting deportation. They reported that he suffered a medical emergency and was pronounced dead at a Newark hospital.

No cause of death has been reported. Lopez-Cornejo’s mother has suggested in interviews that he wasn’t regularly given the medicine he needed for diabetes and high blood pressure, and said he told her a day before his death that his face and hand felt numb. Federal officials say he was given proper medical care at Delaney Hall. They listed his age as 41; his family says he was 39.

The detainee who died before him at Delaney Hall was Jean Wilson Brutus, 41, who in December also suffered what authorities described as a medical emergency, which was later found to be the result of a lung blockage.

Delaney Hall has been in the news for chaotic protest scenes outside the facility since it reopened as an immigration detention center in May 2025. One early confrontation led to the arrest of Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and charges against New Jersey Rep. LaMonica McIver. In June of this year the city set a curfew around Delaney Hall for a few days after protests intensified.

Inside Latimer’s tour of Delaney Hall detention facility

Congress members have invoked their oversight authority since last year to venture inside and inspect the conditions, as New Jersey Reps. Josh Gottheimer, Rob Menendez Jr. and McIver did along with House Speaker Hakeem Jeffries on May 31. Latimer said he had been urged by immigrant advocates to do the same, and he arranged the visit with Torres after checking which fellow New York City-area Democrats were interested.

The tour started about 2 p.m. and took the two House members and their aides through Delaney Hall’s common areas, its dining and recreational areas, and past rooms where detainees sleep in bunk beds.

“You’re looking in a dorm-room thing, and you’re seeing like eight young women sitting around on cots, they have double, triple bunk beds that I saw,” Latimer recalled. “They’re reading, and they’re talking, but it’s not jovial.”

About 835 people were being held at Delaney Hall at that time, he said, with one doctor and six nurse practitioners to care for them. The workers who led the tour and answered questions were all employees of the GEO Group, the Florida-based company given a $1 billion, 15-year federal contract to run the facility. Latimer said he saw no ICE agents or officers in the facility during the tour.

Latimer left feeling “pretty depressed at what I saw.”

“I didn’t see guys being beaten in the hallway, but I didn’t have to see that,” he said. “I saw a philosophy, a different America, where, as I said already, people are being treated like boxes.”

Latimer said he and Torres plan to release a joint statement about their visit when House members return to Washington from their current recess in September. And he said they will also revisit existing bills seeking to change the immigration enforcement system to see what they might change or add to them.

Such legislation stands no chance in a Republicancontrolled Congress and a Donald Trump presidency, Latimer acknowledged. But it could set a marker, he argued, for Congress members and their challengers to show the public where they stand on proposals that could some day be viable.

Torres put out his own statement about their tour on Aug. 4, deploring what he said was “insufficient medical care” with a single doctor for the 893 detainees in Delaney Hall that day (a slightly higher detainee count than Latimer’s). He described the people he saw there as “visibly traumatized and shocked.”

“The vast majority of detainees at Delaney Hall have no criminal history,” he said. “They should not be here. The Trump administration is wasting $1 billion on a facility that should not exist.”

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