



BREAKING NEWS

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Judge approves \$14-million settlement over Sheriff's Department's illegal immigration holds

BY ALENE TCHEKMEDYIAN | STAFF WRITER

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A federal judge on Friday approved a \$14-million settlement in a class-action lawsuit over the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's past [practice of holding people in jail beyond their release dates](#) because of requests from immigration authorities.

The settlement caps a nearly decade-long court battle for people who were held in L.A. County jails illegally for days or months because of pending investigations by Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Only a part of the settlement — \$3.7 million — will go toward the victims. While nearly 20,000 people qualified for relief because they were held unlawfully between October 2010 and June 2014, only 1,166 people filed claims.

“It was very, very difficult to reach people, to locate people and get them to file claims,” said Lindsay Battles, an attorney representing the plaintiffs. “For this case in particular, we faced the additional challenge that many people had been transferred to ICE and then deported.”

Qualified claimants will be paid a maximum of \$1,000 for each day they were held beyond their release date. The payments range from \$250 to \$25,000 per person.

An additional \$4.2 million of the settlement will go toward the plaintiffs' attorneys, which the judge said is "justified by the fact that plaintiffs' attorneys achieved significant results for the class and undertook lengthy and risky litigation."

The remaining money, about \$5.3 million, will fund immigration attorneys, paralegals and others to defend cases involving immigrants at the L.A. County offices of the public defender and alternate public defender.

"The best possible way to protect county residents from unjust deportations and keep families together is to ensure that everyone has a lawyer to defend them," Jennie Pasquarella, immigrant rights' director for ACLU Foundation of Southern California, said in a statement.

The lawsuit was filed against former Sheriff Lee Baca in 2012 by British filmmaker Duncan Roy, who said he [spent nearly three months in L.A. County jails without a chance to post bail](#) after his 2011 arrest. Roy said that the Sheriff's Department denied his requests to post \$35,000 bail because immigration agents had requested he be held.

A federal judge concluded in 2018 that holding inmates beyond their release dates under civil immigration detainers violated their 4th Amendment rights.

The Sheriff's Department's policies and practices have changed significantly since the lawsuit was filed.

Sheriff Alex Villanueva ended the Sheriff's Department's participation in a federal grant program that required the department to share with federal agencies information about inmates who were believed to be in the country illegally.

In April 2020, he put a moratorium on transferring inmates to immigration authorities over concerns about conditions at immigration detention facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. He made the moratorium permanent later that year, banning inmate transfers unless the federal immigration agency obtained a judicial warrant.

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Alene Tchekmedyian covers the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. She previously wrote about the county's criminal courts and breaking news throughout California. Before joining The Times in 2016, she reported on crime and policing for the Glendale News-Press and Burbank Leader. She grew up in Huntington Beach and graduated from UCLA.

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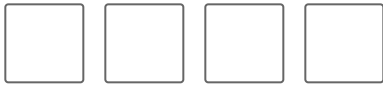
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