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PRESS STATEMENT

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Immigrant Detainee Dies at Mass. Hospital

A Tragic Reminder that Detention System Needs Reform

BOSTON -- On Monday, October 19, Pedro Juan Tavarez, a 49-year-old native of the Dominican Republic in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody, died at Women and Bringham's Hospital in Boston.

ICE was holding Tavarez on immigration violations at The Suffolk County House of Corrections, which transferred him to Brigham and Women's after the correction facility's medical staff suggested possible pneumonia. The hospital was treating Tavarez for heart and respiratory conditions when he died, but the official cause of death has not yet been determined by the medical examiner.

"Mr. Tavarez's death is a tragedy," said Eva Millona, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA). "We don't yet know if his passing could have been avoided. But we do know that the current immigration-detention system relies on a decentralized network of local jails that, in many respects, is simply inhumane. It treats the civil infraction of 'immigration violation' like a criminal offense, and it does not adequately protect the health of its most vulnerable detainees."

MIRA applauds the Obama Administration's acknowledgment of the seriousness of the problem. In August, ICE announced plans to "move away from a jail-oriented approach to a system wholly designed for and based on ICE's civil detention authorities." (See the [ICE fact sheet](#)). But the process won't be complete for three to five years, and the gravity of this delay was recognized earlier this month in a report by Dora B. Schriro, then ICE's Office of Detention Policy and Planning Director, who wrote a top-to-bottom appraisal of the system before quitting to become New York City's correction commissioner. As [The New York Times](#) wrote, the report "calls for prompt attention to individual complaints about a lack of medical care." In an interview with the *Times*, Department of Homeland Security secretary Janet Napolitano could only promise "to implement a system to better place people with medical or mental health needs" within six months.

"Six months is not good enough," said Millona. "Five years is far worse. The detention system demands immediate reform because too often its flaws have led to fatal consequences. We ask Governor Patrick, Massachusetts county authorities, and the individual detention facilities to start implementing reforms now. For too many immigrant detainees -- many of whom are hardworking family members who have broken no criminal laws -- this is truly a life and death issue."

MIRA works to advocate for the rights and opportunities of immigrants and refugees. In partnership with its members, MIRA advances this mission through education, training, leadership development, organizing, policy analysis and advocacy.

