



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on October 14, 2014

Number of Illegal Immigrant Detainees to Increase at N.M. Facility

Mayor Phillip Burch of Artesia, New Mexico, where the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has a temporary detention facility for adults with children who have entered our country illegally, has said that the facility is likely to receive more detainees soon, adding that it will not be closed in the near future.

Burch said in an interview with the Associated Press that new detainees are expected to arrive at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), now that officials have lifted a quarantine put in place following a few cases of chickenpox.



After that outbreak of chickenpox, Rep. Steve Pearce (R-N.M.), whose district includes Artesia, expressed concerns about the situation in an interview with the *Washington Times* on July 30:

As the FLETC facility reaches maximum capacity, I am increasingly concerned for the health and safety of the women and children at FLETC and for the local community. The virus, that has caused two residents to be put in isolation, has halted all departures.

Burch told the Associated Press that 68 detainees were released to the public, and more than a dozen were deported last week from the Artesia detention facility. He and other city officials were briefed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials on the latest numbers during a weekly meeting.

The Associated Press cited ICE spokeswoman Leticia Zamarripa, who said 324 detainees have been deported to Central America since the center opened in Artesia in late June.

Of those, 182 were sent to Honduras, 88 to Guatemala, 50 to El Salvador, and four to Ecuador.

A report in *International Business Times* on October 13 noted that the Artesia facility was the country's first family detention center to open specifically for illegal Central American migrants. These numbers swelled from last October to July, as 63,000 unaccompanied children entered the United States illegally — double the number from the same period a year earlier. These children have routinely been placed with sponsoring families, pending the outcome of hearings to determine their status by immigration judges — a process that may take years.

When children crossed the border illegally with their parents, however, they were likely to be detained at facilities such as the one in Artesia, or another in Karnes County, Texas.

Before the Artesia center opened, immigration authorities routinely released migrant families into the interior of the United States (similar to how unaccompanied illegal immigrant children are still handled) with orders to report to immigration officials when their deportation hearings were held.

As we reported last July, however, many minors did not show up for their hearings. Judge Michael Baird



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of the federal Dallas Immigration Court said on July 22 that 18 children whose cases he was scheduled to hear on that day didn't come to court. The unaccompanied children were among 20 from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala who were set to appear in Baird's court for initial deportation hearings.

The policy of housing illegal immigrants at detention facilities represents a slight toughening of immigration enforcement by the Obama administration from how it previously handled such illegals. Reuters reported on October 12 that during the past five years, the administration preferred restrictive programs, such as ankle bracelets and telephone check-ins, for keeping track of families while they awaited court decisions on whether or not they would be deported.

The policy change came last June as the worsening illegal immigration crisis caused by the massive increase of migrants from Central America overwhelmed the system and prompted demands from Americans that something be done to secure our borders and stem the tide. The crisis also threatened to jeopardize the chances of Democratic senators facing reelection this November.

The policy change did produce criticism from immigrants' rights groups, however.

"The Obama administration in 2009 decided that it was going to turn away from family detention ... the turn back is really alarming," said Carl Takei of the American Civil Liberties Union.

The ACLU may have a point, however. Perhaps the Obama administration should try an approach that will save the taxpayers millions of dollars, make our nation more secure, and avoid the humanitarian problems associated with family detention. That approach would be — family deportation.

Photo shows woman and child being escorted to a van at the Artesia, N.M., family facility for illegal immigrants: AP Images

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