

# ICE OUT OF NORCOR



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**Oscar** greets me with a warm smile and asks me how I am doing. He has been at NORCOR for only a week, but has been sent between the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma and NORCOR several times before this. In total, he has been in detention for almost two years.

I ask him if he has been in touch with his family, and he swiftly looks more tired and winces. He has two children, both middle school age. His daughter loves violin, and has been playing at a very high level for her age for several years now. Last week, she left her violin at her bus stop and lost it, and of course is devastated. It is very painful for him to not be able to comfort her in this upsetting time for her.

Oscar is fighting so hard to stay in this country because, even if his birth country of Honduras was a place he felt safe bringing his children to—which it is not—he cannot remove them from the country without the permission of their mother. He has not been in touch with their mother for several years. He reports that she struggles with addiction and mental illness, and as far as he knows, is living somewhere in Seattle on the streets. He reports that the woman who used to babysit his kids is now their primary guardian—they do not have other family locally. Oscar has lived in the United States since he was eight years old, and this is home for him and his family.

Oscar finds comfort in reading the Bible, and in drawing. This helps calm his mind and gives him hope while in captivity. He reports that the last time he came into NORCOR, his drawing pencils were seized along with most of his personal possessions he purchased from the commissary at NWDC. I asked why that happened, when I have seen other people who are detained with numerous personal items. He tells me that sometimes NORCOR lets them

keep their items; sometimes they take everything, even their clothes— it seems arbitrary and feels punitive.

A major challenge he reports with being in NORCOR is the lack of resources for people in the middle of immigration cases. NWDC has an immigration law library; NORCOR only has a library with resources for criminal law. It is a very difficult place for people to stay in long-term, especially those who need good access to resources to prepare their case or affordably call their lawyers.

He noted that even the handbook for NORCOR and NWDC illustrate the difference in perspective for people who are being held in detention: at NWDC, they are called “guests”. At NORCOR, they are called “criminals”.

He reports that there have been instances where people are taken from NWDC and put in a bus without being told why they are leaving or where they are going. It is only when they see the sign for “The Dalles” and they realize where they are going that some begin crying, dreading the return to NORCOR.

Still, he wanted to emphasize that the staff at NORCOR are, for the most part, very respectful. To him, they seem like kind and relatable people just trying to do their jobs. He says that it is the protocol that the staff has to enforce, not the staff themselves, which makes NORCOR a difficult place to be.

Oscar says, “We’re not trying to make trouble. We are just trying to be comfortable enough to cope with the stress of not knowing how long we will be here, how our case will go, and when or if we’ll ever be released.”

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*This story is one in a series of stories from immigrants who have been detained at NORCOR, a four-county public jail in The Dalles, OR. NORCOR has a contract to rent out beds to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) - in violation of Oregon’s 30-year-old sanctuary law. The stories in this series have been written by either clergy or attorneys - the only people who are currently allowed to visit immigrants detained at NORCOR. Oscar’s story is a composite of multiple stories that shares the truth of the experiences of those detained and protects their identities.*