



*****PRESS RELEASE*****

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Community Members Plan a Memorial Service for Deceased Immigrant Detainee

GADSDEN, Alabama — Late in January of 2016, Mr. Teka Gulema, an Ethiopian national who had been detained at the Etowah County Immigration Detention Center, passed away after spending nearly a year in serious condition at a Gadsden hospital. About a month before he passed away, ICE released him from their custody, although at that point he had been paralyzed for months. Local community members and faith leaders are planning an interfaith memorial service to honor Mr. Gulema and to call on ICE to take responsibility for and adequately investigate his death. The memorial will be today, Sunday, February 28th, from 3:30-5pm, outside of the Etowah County Immigration Detention Center.

Although the details surrounding Mr. Gulema's illness and death are scarce, we do know that the infection that eventually led to his paralysis and death began at the center. Since ICE released him from their custody just before his death, they were not obligated to fulfill any of their regular obligations, such as notifying media and conducting a death investigation, stipulated by ICE directive number 7-9.0.

Tommy Morgan, a local pastor and organizer of the memorial service, says "When the dignity and peace one is born with is stripped away all our lives are made cheaper. Unnecessary deaths affect not one...but all." The event will be held to honor Mr. Gulema's life as well as to put pressure on ICE to accept responsibility for their role in his death and conduct a full-scale investigation.

The conditions at the Etowah County Detention Center are now so negligent that it is deadly for the hundreds of men who are within its walls. This is not unique to Etowah: a recent report entitled [*Fatal Neglect: How ICE Ignores Deaths in Detention*](#), written by the American Civil Liberties Union, Detention Watch Network, and the National Immigrant Justice Center, outlines the many instances where deaths in detention center were either under-investigated or were caused as a direct result of ICE's inadequate health care. ICE cannot hide behind shady practices and denials any longer: if they are holding people for years within their walls, they must adequately care for them. No more deaths in detention!