

TRACKED & TRAPPED

Experiences from ICE Digital Prisons

MAY 2022



Boston Immigration Justice
Accompaniment Network — *Beyond*



DETENTION
WATCH NETWORK



FREEDOM
FOR IMMIGRANTS



JUST
FUTURES
LAW

LA RESISTENCIA



ENVISION
FREEDOM

OCAID
ORGANIZED COMMUNITIES AGAINST DEPORTATIONS



YOUTH
JUSTICE
COALITION

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Graphic Designer: OORI Studio

“ICE tracks my location 24 hours a day on SmartLink. If the location is turned off, the program is disconfigured. It’s stressful because you only get five attempts to send them a picture, but sometimes the pictures fail all five attempts....It isn’t just. Supervision is not just.”

- D.F.

“With SmartLink, it still felt like I had the shackle on - I just didn’t have it on physically now. Once SmartLink was gone, I began to feel more at ease. Honestly, I don’t wish this on anyone I know or anyone I don’t know, because we all have a right to be free.”

- R.C.

“I want to do anything I can so everyone can be free of electronic imprisonment. It might seem like it’s impossible to stop this system, but it isn’t. We can do it, and I believe that if we work together we can all be free.”

- Carlos

INTRODUCTION

Over the last year, the Biden administration has rapidly expanded the so-called “Alternatives to Detention” (ATD) program of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Also known as the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP), this electronic monitoring program now has more than 227,000 immigrants under constant surveillance as of April 2022, **more than double the number enrolled in the program when President Biden took office.**² Though ISAP is pitched as an “alternative” to the inhumane and irreparable ICE detention system, it is not an alternative. Instead, the program expands the carceral reach of ICE and bolsters all forms of immigrant detention. As community member Mario Perez describes it, ICE’s electronic monitoring program is nothing but “crumbs towards freedom” which keeps immigrants in digital cages. **We will settle for nothing less than an end to the criminalization of immigration. The only true alternative to detention is freedom.**

This report highlights the excruciating toll that ICE electronic monitoring takes on immigrant communities, underscoring the need for a transformative shift in our approach to immigration. Despite ICE’s claims to the contrary, digital prisons are physically inhibitive and harmful to health and wellbeing.

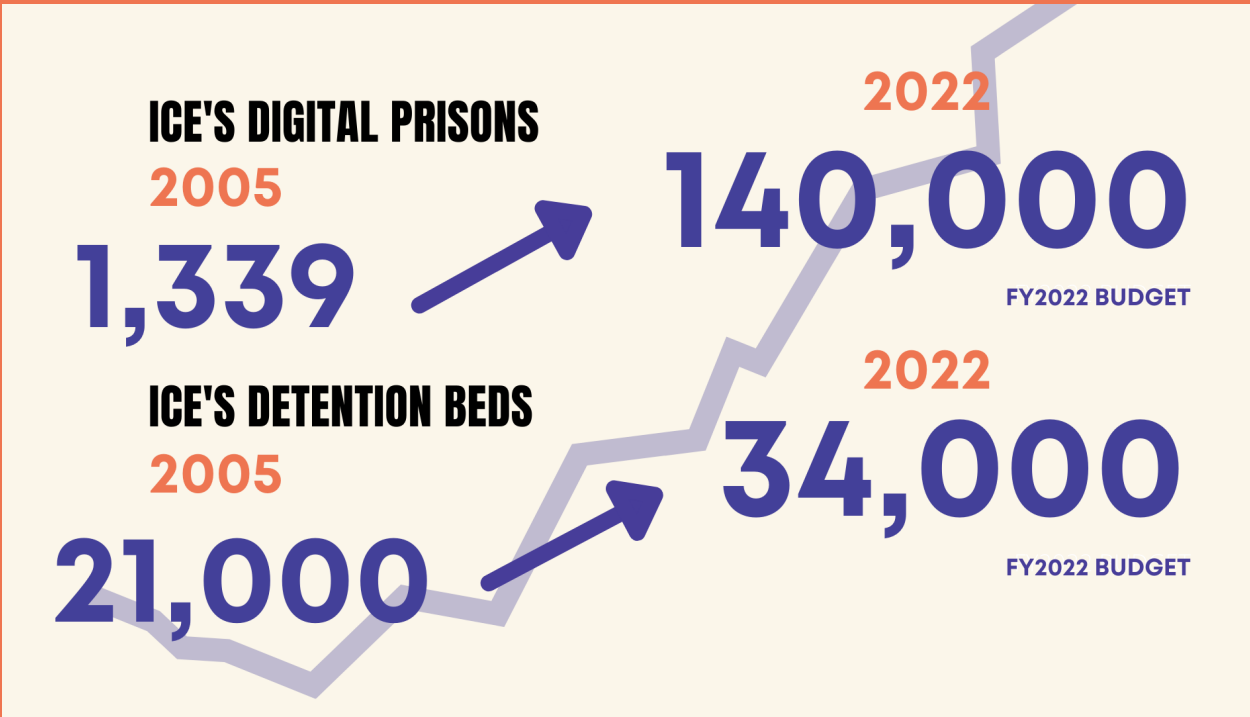
ICE’s goal for ISAP has always been tighter control of immigrants and an increase in all forms of detention. In 2004, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) entered into a contract for ISAP with B.I. Incorporated, a prison technology company that first sold its technology to track cattle, and a subsidiary of GEO Group, which operates private prisons across the world.³ Since then, B.I. Incorporated has been the sole contractor for the program, securing billions over the last two decades from the e-carceration of immigrants as well as others subject to systems of mass incarceration around the world.⁴ Today, ICE relies on B.I.’s ankle shackles,⁵ facial recognition through the SmartLink phone application, voice verification technology, and system of office check-ins, home visits, travel restrictions, and house arrest to detain immigrants in digital prisons.⁶

We will settle for nothing less than an end to the criminalization of immigration. The only true alternative to detention is freedom.



The only way to reduce detention is to end all forms of detention. However, since the early years of the program, DHS has disingenuously marketed ISAP as a program that will reduce the number of immigrants in detention.⁷ Almost two decades later, the reality is far from this – ISAP is growing quickly across the country at the same time as an increase in people in detention beds, expanding ICE’s control over far more immigrants. Every ICE Field Office added people to the program in the last year; some offices saw several hundred percent increases in the number of people in digital custody.⁸ These increases highlight the coordinated carceral expansion carried out by the Biden administration. And no amount of rhetoric can hide the fact that ISAP is another form of detention, not a departure from it.

Additionally, the mobile application SmartLink has grown to become ICE’s monitoring technology of choice. Between June 2019 and April 2022, the number of people on SmartLink in ISAP increased from 12% to 76%.⁹ Many ICE field offices like Baltimore, Dallas, New York, and Phoenix saw almost 1000% percent increases in the number of people on SmartLink in the last year alone. Border field offices like Harlingen are recording more than 20,000 immigrants on SmartLink as of April 2022.



PERCENT INCREASE BY FIELD OFFICE

Atlanta	52.91%	New Orleans	21.04%
Baltimore	51.95%	New York	120.20%
Boston	258.25%	Newark	91.75%
Buffalo	42.40%	Philadelphia	115.13%
Chicago	57.03%	Phoenix	1095.33%
Dallas	133.89%	Salt Lake City	57.76%
Denver	121.29%	San Antonio	364.57%
Detroit	7.05%	San Diego	68.87%
El Paso	401.18%	San Francisco	33.65%
Houston	6.41%	Seattle	51.12%
Los Angeles	39.85%	St. Paul	20.19%
Miami	104.28%	Washington DC	73.26%

Percent increase in number of individuals enrolled between MAY 2021 & APR 2022 by Field Office.
Data compiled from ICE disclosures at <https://www.ice.gov/detain/detention-management#tab2>

While ICE has pitched mobile surveillance as a more humane alternative, SmartLink poses heightened surveillance, data collection and human rights threats. With capabilities to monitor devices and location 24/7 through a smartphone, the application can gain access to intimate details about someone's personal life and make it virtually impossible to live, work, and participate in society without being watched. Throughout this report, the personal experiences of people subjected to SmartLink convey how mobile surveillance also causes deep and lasting emotional trauma to entire families and communities.

We are at a critical moment. **The Biden administration has requested \$527 million in FY2023 funding for the program to sustain and intensify the e-carceration of 200,000 immigrants.**¹⁰ As of March 2022, ICE has already passed this goal of enrolling 200,000 people in the program, and has projected that it may require more than 400,000 immigrants to be in the program by the end of next year.¹¹ Moreover, ICE announced the start of a house arrest and curfew pilot program, further increasing its tight control on immigrants and thwarting any possibility for a sustainable livelihood.¹² Additionally, with more than half a billion dollars in annual funding, it is likely that ICE will turn to new, emerging technologies such as surveillance wristbands to expand constant surveillance and further integrate these technologies into the vast ICE surveillance system which fuels the enforcement, detention, and deportation machine.

At the center of the policy failures and profit-boosting contracts for corporations are the people subject to ICE's electronic monitoring program.

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KEY FINDINGS

- **ISAP surveillance is a digital form of detention and the state's constant reminder of the lack of autonomy immigrants have over their own bodies and futures.** Across technologies, surveillance causes physical and psychological trauma, prevents employment, and negatively impacts entire families and communities.

- **ICE poses enrollment in ISAP as voluntary, when in reality it is a forced choice between brick-and mortar detention and digital detention.** Once people are in the program, ICE provides contradictory or disingenuous information about the steps to take to eventually access freedom from constant ICE surveillance, arbitrarily changing the rules moment by moment and creating humiliation, fear and a lack of agency for immigrants targeted by these systems.

- **SmartLink causes deep anxiety about ICE's access to personal lives and a constant sense of being watched, particularly for communities of color who are overwhelmingly subjected to ISAP and targeted by all forms of law enforcement more broadly.** In addition to limiting a person's livelihood, the fear of constant monitoring silences family ties, organizing efforts, and the ability for immigrants to speak freely and advocate for themselves and their communities.

- **Ankle shackles are painful, intrusive, stigmatizing, unsafe and disruptive to daily life – they are another form of incarceration.** Even after ankle shackles are removed, their negative physical and psychological effects are long-lasting.

- **Mandatory ICE and ISAP check-ins cause emotional distress, anxiety, and fear of retaliation.** Check-ins are extremely time-consuming, making it nearly impossible to hold a job or care for family members and loved ones.

- **ICE does not conduct regular de-escalation reviews as outlined by its own guidelines, often ignoring them altogether, making surveillance a perpetually continuing reality.** There is no transparency about the process and de-escalation requests are frequently rejected.

More and more, our communities and organizations are resisting and challenging ICE's ISAP program – including by sharing personal testimonials that show the many harmful impacts of ISAP, as the people featured in this report have done. There is growing consensus that ISAP is just another form of caging and shackling through high-tech surveillance, and many people are now organizing to demand an end to all forms of detention. Recently, more than 175 groups endorsed a Congressional letter condemning the ISAP program.¹³ For years, our organizations have organized in partnership with people who are subjected to digital detention and surveillance through the ISAP program. The power of our collective organizing has grown as the ISAP program quickly expanded from a small “pilot” program to a multi-billion dollar e-carceration program surveilling hundreds of thousands of people everyday.

Drawing from the deep expertise of the people featured in this report, as well as the decades of experience among our communities and our groups' members, our demands are simple: the Biden administration should defund ISAP on the path to dismantling ICE and DHS altogether. ATD is not an alternative to detention, and ICE will never set a path for true freedom. That is why the following demands must immediately be met.



CORE DEMANDS

- **We demand ICE end all detention and ISAP altogether. ISAP is not a trade-off for detention and we demand that all forms of caging be rejected.** ICE often pits ISAP and detention numbers against each other, suggesting that if advocates and communities want to reduce detention, we must accept increased ISAP and vice versa. This is a false choice and a political tactic to justify the ongoing targeting of immigrant communities. The reality is that ICE has never treated surveillance and detention as a zero sum game but has instead drastically expanded both. And both should be rejected.

- **We demand ICE immediately cease enrolling new people into ISAP and conduct large-scale de-escalation to release everyone currently subject to ISAP from the program.** De-escalation should be carried out in the shortest possible time frame, with frequent reporting on progress and access for independent monitoring of the process.

- **We demand ICE immediately cancel its contract with B.I. Incorporated and end any partnerships to develop new technologies for e-carceration such as surveillance wristbands.** ICE's expanding, multi-billion dollar partnership with B.I. represents the massive investment that it is willing to make to continue criminalizing immigration while lining the pockets of prison and surveillance technology corporations.

- **We demand ICE and B.I. Incorporated immediately delete all data collected from the program and ensure any data shared with or sold to other government agencies, private entities or other third parties is purged.** We demand ICE and B.I. Incorporated provide a detailed, public report on the surveillance that has been conducted via the program, including all means of surveillance utilized, what data was being collected, for what purposes surveillance data was used, who had access to the data, and any other relevant details.

- **We demand Congress reject the Biden administration's \$527 million request for funding and expansion of ISAP and defund the program and all forms of detention.** Rather than funding resources like healthcare and education that support community wellbeing, Biden is requesting \$527 million for the ATD program — a 20% increase from 2022 — to fund ICE's "continued expansion and reliance" on e-carceration and surveillance technology weapons that will skyrocket the number of people that ICE subjects to digital detention on a daily basis.¹⁴

ISAP'S IMPACT ON PEOPLE

Every digital prison—every ankle shackle, SmartLink application, and voice verification call—impacts a person. As the following testimonials illuminate, ISAP has a deeply harmful impact on the lives of not only those who are subjected to the program but also their families and communities as well. We are grateful to the following people for sharing their personal experiences and advocating for the dignity and freedom we all deserve.

R.C.

Samuel

M.O.

Hassane

D.F.

Julia

Michael Bongani Langa

Mario Perez

S.A.

Anonymous

Carlos



R.C.

“Just to download SmartLink and accept all the terms of use, I felt I was opening up permission for them to have access to everything in my telephone. In spite of the fact that they had removed my shackle, I still had the sensation that I was being watched, because basically that is what it is ... I don’t wish this on anyone I know or anyone I don’t know, because we all have a right to be free.”

The first time I came to the U.S. I was arrested in the airport and taken straight to detention. I couldn’t sleep or eat and I had nightmares. When they put the ankle shackle on me, it felt strange because it’s an artifact that did not belong to my body. My ankle hurt, the skin where the shackle was hurt. I lost a lot of peace and confidence in myself. It damaged me psychologically. I was afraid to be on the street with this shackle visible, thinking what if a police officer saw me. I felt so unsafe and unsure, I felt that strangers would judge me on sight. You feel watched, surveilled, not just by the device, but by the people in your community who notice it.

The ankle shackle is like still being in jail. You’re outside, but you’re in jail. I couldn’t sleep well. Out on the street, the battery would start to die and start to make noise, “low battery, recharge unit” even if I just finished charging it. I would go to the office to get another battery, but they’d give me an old battery, and it would become damaged quickly. All of a sudden they were calling me - or worse, they were calling my sister and my sister was calling me, worried - because it’s not just you, this affects your whole family.

I couldn’t work, because one day a week I had to be home. I could only be outside during certain times. When I would apply for jobs, not only did I have to explain this schedule, but they would ask why I had this on me. It was very uncomfortable, really difficult.

And the monthly office visits. They make you sit for hours, wait all this time for nothing. If I had to go in the morning, they would make me be there all day. I'd have to call someone to pick my children up from school. So much time lost in the ISAP office, waiting for them to call you, ask you if you have the same address, phone number, contact people, they call a few of your contacts...on top of everything, they speak to you so aggressively.

My children would ask me why I had this. Even they could see the stress it was causing me. I couldn't even drop my son off at school. My son has many special medical needs and the restrictions with this shackle impeded me in being able to seek adequate medical care for him. I eventually found a hospital in Philadelphia that could treat him, but I report to ISAP in NYC. I had to ask for permission from ISAP to leave NYC, and even when they would give it, sometimes I'd be on the bus leaving NYC and the shackle would start to beep and everyone would look at me as though I were trying to escape from something, then the office would call me. When they removed my shackle after a year and two months, I felt a relief, I felt they had removed a weight from on top of me, I felt more calm.

After the shackle was removed, I had SmartLink for 5 or 6 months. Just to download SmartLink and accept all the terms of use, I felt I was opening up permission for them to have access to everything in my telephone. In spite of the fact that they had removed my shackle, I still had the sensation that I was being watched, because basically that is what it is. When you take the required photos to send to them, they know the location where you took that photo, if you were at home, if you weren't at home. It doesn't feel good to have someone always watching your steps, even less so when you know you aren't doing anything wrong.

With SmartLink, it still felt like I had the shackle on - I just didn't have it on physically now. Once SmartLink was gone, I began to feel more at ease. Honestly, I don't wish this on anyone I know or anyone I don't know, because we all have a right to be free. And if the politicians and people who are in charge of investing all of their money in this could hear this, I just wish they'd invest their money in something else. This doesn't help anything.

SAMUEL

“The shackle feels like it weighs two kilos. It gives me two kinds of pain. One is when I walk, I feel pain in the bones I had previously broken when I played soccer. And the second is constant headaches, it’s very strange. . .I see it as a form of manipulation. They are trying to make me look like the worst possible person, they are trying to make me give up, to go back.”

I am from Trujillo, Colon, Honduras. I lived in a Garifuna community called Cristales y Rio Negro. We lived humbly. I painted, I played soccer, I studied. I met my wife, we had a baby. We had our own house, a house left to me by my grandparents. Everything was okay until our community began to be threatened by the Honduran government and by foreigners, Canadians, who were arriving. Where I’m from is on the edge of the ocean, with beautiful beaches, and these people were arriving wanting to exploit our community to build tourism, threatening us and attempting to displace our entire community. People arrived at our homes with firearms, telling us our land was no longer ours. The day I decided to leave, a group of armed men arrived at our property and entered our back patio. They weren’t military or police. You could say they were privately contracted. They were shooting. Thank God they didn’t hit us, but for my safety and the safety of my family we had to leave.

Here in the U.S., there is an opportunity to be in peace, to have some rights. But there is also the whole trauma of arriving, being placed in an ankle shackle, being treated like you’re dangerous, with no regard for what you’ve survived in your country. When they put that on my leg, I cried, of course. To see that they also put it on my wife? No. I asked myself why. We had just crossed the border. It didn’t make sense.

The first time someone noticed my ankle shackle in public - it was terrifying. The shackle yelled “recharge battery!” while I was in an elevator with two people, and they both looked so scared.

Going to the ISAP office, I had this sense of foreboding. The office uses a kind of camouflage, you’re not sure if you’re in the right place. You feel like you’re entering a prison. At my check-ins, I’ve seen ICE officers take someone, put a chain around their neck, chains on their hands and feet, cover their mouth, take them out a back door, and throw them in an unmarked van. They did this like it just didn’t matter. I wanted to record them to show people what was happening, but I was scared that they would take me too. It makes me feel very unsafe. I don’t know what they’re going to do, if they’re going to conduct a raid, with all of us trapped in there.

The shackle feels like it weighs two kilos. It gives me two kinds of pain. One is when I walk, I feel pain in the bones I had previously broken when I played soccer. And the second is constant headaches, it’s very strange. I think it has to do with the frequency that the shackle emits, it causes pulsations in my head, and my heart rate changes or I feel vibrations in my legs. I told my ISAP case worker, but he ignored me. I think it’s really dangerous, I think it can cause tumors, cancer. I’d like for this to be investigated.

It’s a business for them to keep us in this. First, they told me I would only have the shackle for one month. After a month passed, they told me they’d remove it when I gave them my passport. After I gave them my passport, they told me they’d remove it after my first immigration court hearing. After my hearing, they told me they’d remove it once I have a lawyer. After I requested to ISAP for it to be removed, they told me to take that request to ICE. When I took the request to ICE, they told me I’d have to wait until the end of my court proceedings.

I see it as a form of manipulation. They are trying to make me look like the worst possible person, they are trying to make me give up, to go back. Here may not be so great, but back there it is definitely worse, and my life was in danger. To be Garifuna is to enter into a war and never leave it...now I just have to have patience.

A stylized sun with orange rays is partially visible in the top right corner. The letters 'M.O.' are written in orange on a blue background in the top left corner.

M.O.

“Now they supervise him on the SmartLink app, and we limit ourselves in speaking out of fear that one day there will be retaliation. This monitoring is nothing more than discrimination . . .To the elected officials that give billions to these surveillance companies: you are sincerely humiliating us as human beings. Put yourselves in our shoes, we did not come to harm anyone.”

In my country, there is a security and economic crisis. I had a business, but they extorted me. So my daughter, my husband and I fled to the U.S. to seek better opportunities and security for my daughter. When we arrived to ask for asylum, we passed through the wrong side and an immigration officer began to insult us. From that moment I felt humiliated, I felt trampled – I never imagined that they would treat us that way.

We were detained. It was terribly cold, and they repeatedly insulted us. They told us that we smelled bad, to take a bath, but they didn’t allow us to. The bathrooms were not private. When they released us, they put the ankle monitor on my husband and me. My foot and ankle hurt a lot, even when I slept. When I told them it was painful, they told me I had to suck it up or not walk a lot. My skin started to peel. They told us that if we gave them our passport, they would remove the ankle monitor, but when we tried to, they told us that it doesn’t work like that. They lie to us and mock us!



We always live with fear. We were always aware of our monitor out of fear that we could get re-detained. One day, I had gone out to do laundry and it started beeping nonstop because it was broken. I always wore pants that covered the monitor because people would look at me in a bad way. I felt that we couldn't go anywhere, not even out to eat. My neighbor's kids used to play with my daughter. One day, my neighbor got scared when she saw my ankle monitor. I explained, but she told her kids not to come near my daughter because we were dangerous people. One cannot live a normal life with this.

We moved to Chicago, and they removed my ankle monitor, but not my husband's. When I was pregnant, an attorney submitted a letter and doctors' notes to ICE and told them my husband couldn't have the monitor because he sleeps next to me. They removed it, but now they supervise him on the SmartLink app, and we limit ourselves in speaking out of fear that one day there will be retaliation. This monitoring is nothing more than discrimination.

To the elected officials that give billions to these surveillance companies: you are sincerely humiliating us as human beings. Put yourselves in our shoes, we did not come to harm anyone. To the people who live with this surveillance, look for organizations to support you, the strength is in unifying, do everything possible to get this removed. Fight for your rights, do not give up, and always have your dignity high.



HASSANE

“You walk around, you see people, you entertain yourself maybe. But it’s another form of incarceration because with that, your mind is never really at peace. You live with constant fear in your belly, you are embarrassed ... It weighs heavily.”

I was born in Guinea where I worked with an NGO to increase girls’ enrollment in school. In college, I began to be politically active, fighting against female genital mutilation, against STDs, fighting for education. I became a member of the main opposition party, the Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea, and I participated in demonstrations for human rights like any citizen. I was arrested and incarcerated several times. The last time, I was only able to get out of the hole after a great deal of negotiations. Once I was out, I had to leave the country to save my life.

When I arrived in the U.S., immigration held us in a basement for a week. It’s another prison. It doesn’t meet the requirements to hold a human being. We were about 20 people inside. There was no window and the toilet was in the room with us. With a temperature that is very, very low, they give you a “blanket” of aluminum. From there, I was transferred to Otay Mesa Detention Center where I was incarcerated for four months. “Detention Center” is a play on words; it’s a jail. It’s not at all easy to keep level headed and keep on fighting. It’s actually very, very hard.

The day you are released, they put a GPS on your ankle. The GPS is another form of incarceration. You walk around, you see people, you entertain yourself maybe. But it's another form of incarceration because with that, your mind is never really at peace. You live with constant fear in your belly, you are embarrassed. The whole time I wore the GPS, I never once wore short pants outside. People will look at you as if you're someone who's very dangerous. You always hide. People don't know why you have a GPS, and your morale is low.

Then there's the battery. They say 8 hours of battery life, but after 2 or 3 hours, the GPS starts emitting cries, and if you don't change the battery quickly, you receive a call. If you don't answer, your relatives or friends will receive calls...a friend, a cousin, a nephew. It can be 4 AM, but that doesn't prevent them from calling. It weighs heavily.

Each month, I had to report to the ISAP office. I submitted multiple written requests to have the GPS removed. I was told I needed to give them my passport, but Guinea would not issue me a passport. After I submitted the third letter I was told that it was ICE's decision. So I took a fourth letter to ICE's office. Finally, I received a call one evening. I was told to report the next day and they removed it, saying "you are free, you're no longer in the system." It was such a relief. After so much incarceration, in Guinea, in the U.S., after leaving the detention center with this GPS, once they removed it, that's when I felt free. It was as if I had shed this heavy burden.





D.F.

“ICE tracks my location 24 hours a day on SmartLink. If the location is turned off, the program is disconfigured. It’s stressful because you only get five attempts to send them a picture, but sometimes the pictures fail all five attempts. On other apps, I can remove the permission to use location, and that’s it. . .It isn’t just. Supervision is not just. Detention isn’t just.”

My wife and I were on an ankle monitor for 4 months before coming to Chicago. Upon presenting ourselves in the ICE Chicago office, they told us it wasn’t necessary for her to have it, but that I had to have it as head of the family. After a year, I got switched to SmartLink, where I have to send pictures of myself every Tuesday, receive calls, and go to the offices. I’ve never lived anything like this before. From the moment supervision starts, be it the ankle monitor or the SmartLink app, you feel bad. It affects you a lot psychologically.

Being on an ankle monitor for a year was intense. You can’t let it run out of battery, but the more time passes, the less life the battery has. One time, it turned off at 3 AM and three different officers called me in the span of ten minutes asking where I am, where I am escaping to. That kills you psychologically and damaged me physically. It hurt to sleep, to take a bath, and to walk.

I’ve had many experiences where someone mistook me for a dangerous person who has done terrible things. One time, I went to the liquor store and someone told me it’s not right to be violating the conditions of my liberty. I wasn’t treated this way in my country, and to come here and get treated this way does affect me.



ICE tracks my location 24 hours a day on SmartLink. If the location is turned off, the program is disconfigured. It's stressful because you only get five attempts to send them a picture, but sometimes the pictures fail all five attempts. On other apps, I can remove the permission to use location, and that's it. Because of both the ankle monitor and SmartLink, I've missed out on many good job opportunities. Employers don't understand if you can't come to work certain days of the week, or if you have to miss work 1-3 times a month. I would get hired, but once I told them the conditions I'm in, they would say I can't work.

I have a message for the politicians: this is a bad investment. You are wasting this country's money on things that don't make any sense. You should invest in addressing other things, like poverty or addiction. It isn't just. Supervision is not just. Detention isn't just.

JULIA

“When I was looking for a school for my daughters. . .They initially told me they had spots available for them. But once they realized that I was wearing an ankle shackle, they told me that they were canceling their spots. . .It was a very unpleasant, shameful, and difficult experience for my kids that I don’t wish on any family. That was only one of many terrible moments, which is why I made the decision to not go outside while I had the ankle shackle on.”

My name is Julia. I am Garifuna from Honduras. I arrived in the U.S. about 4 years ago. I entered the country with my two daughters and we spent two days in the ice box, a prison that I would not desire for anyone. This was horrible. Then we were sent to South Texas Family Residential Center where we were for three weeks, an Odyssey.

In order to get out of this place they put an ankle shackle on me that was even worse and I had to wear it for about 4 months. The experience was not easy for me as a person and I stayed inside for much of the time. Because wearing the ankle shackle made me feel so ashamed and I felt very bad when people would look at me with this ankle shackle, that made me very stressed and played against me. Psychologically I did not feel well. Because of this I ask with all of my heart that the government officials please stop financing the companies and the people that are making so much money from manufacturing these ankle shackles.



When I was looking for a school for my daughters, one of the most unpleasant experiences I had was due to the ankle shackle. They initially told me they had spots available for them. But once they realized that I was wearing an ankle shackle, they told me that they were canceling their spots. It affected my family very much. Even worse, when we left the place, we felt watched by the personnel [at the school]. It was a very unpleasant, shameful, and difficult experience for my kids that I don't wish on any family. That was only one of many terrible moments, which is why I made the decision to not go outside while I had the ankle shackle on.

I believe it is better to use money for education for immigrant people and other people who need it.

MICHAEL BONGANI LANGA

“SmartLink reminds me of Apartheid in my country. The constant harassment by police everyday because you’re a member of a certain political party. This was a situation where one has to live in exile trying to run away from the police. Apartheid took a toll on me and many people who were brutally harassed or killed by the system. That psychological damage created trauma that’ll live with me as long as I live.”

I was born in South Africa, in Durban, now known as KZN. I hold two Masters Degrees in Psychology & Theology. I came to America legally through a J-1 Visa to work as a Behavioral Psychologist. I have been in this country almost 22 years paying taxes and following the law. Unfortunately my marriage broke down and as a result I was picked up by ICE in 2018 and was detained for 11 months.

I was released on a \$3,500 bond on condition that I wear a GPS monitoring device. If the GPS does not work for one reason or another, ICE Officers call and threaten to detain you, claiming you violated the terms of your release. You don’t get a chance to report it when the device is not working properly, cause ICE Officers will be on your back. What is shocking is that ICE Officers do not answer their phones if you want to report something BUT if they call you, they expect you to answer immediately.

With the GPS, I couldn't walk properly and it created bruises on my leg. Over and above the health issues, the GPS created a stigma in the community and I was looked at like I was dangerous. For almost a year, I called my ICE Officer to complain about the GPS and he refused to take it off. Then my lawyer took me to show ICE the condition of my leg.

After that, they finally took it off and put me on SmartLink, where you're given a one hour window every Tuesday to upload a selfie. If you fail to do this, you go through constant harassment and you're required to go to ICE offices the next day to fulfill this requirement. SmartLink is much better than the GPS but it has its restrictions. It affects your economic situation because you cannot work under the table to support your kids.

I have two boys born in this country. One cannot sit at home because of immigration restrictions and not do something to support his life and his kids and to pay bills, doctors' bills, and taxes. So SmartLink is not the way. You cannot work on Tuesdays, PLUS once a month you're expected to stay home. NO one can hire you on these conditions. You cannot leave town and if the job is out of state, one cannot take it.

SmartLink reminds me of Apartheid in my country. The constant harassment by police everyday because you're a member of a certain political party. This was a situation where one has to live in exile trying to run away from the police. Apartheid took a toll on me and many people who were brutally harassed or killed by the system. That psychological damage created trauma that'll live with me as long as I live. Apartheid and Detention without trial was an order in South Africa. Now immigration and Detention PLUS Deportation is the order of the day in America. Being torn away from your family because of this inhumane treatment is a violation of human rights.

MARIO PEREZ

“Folks that have been incarcerated and are now on ATD may shy away from sharing their experiences because we are meant to believe that this is the ‘better’ option and we should be grateful. With that said, I have not been able to heal from the traumas of incarceration because digital shackles are NOT alternatives to freedom. . .This entire ATD system has been created to make it as difficult as possible for us to reintegrate back to our lives, families, and communities.”

I am a Mexican native. My family migrated to the Inland Empire, California when I was 5, where I have lived for 30+ years. In 2013, I was granted DACA, but due to mistakes that affected my criminal record, I was not able to renew my work authorization. My case was funneled into the immigration system and triggered an ICE arrest that kept me incarcerated at an ICE facility in 2018. I was released after 6 months and placed on ATD.

Before I was released, ICE placed an ankle monitor on me. For the first 7 months, I had weekly ICE home visits that kept me home from 6am-6pm, and biweekly check-ins. After 7 months, I was instructed to download SmartLink, and every Monday I take a photo between 8am-10am and submit it via the app, which shares your location. I continued biweekly check-ins at their office until Covid, when we switched to video calls, but their systems are faulty so video calls usually never worked. Now they have regular phone calls.

Folks that have been incarcerated and are now on ATD may shy away from sharing their experiences because we are meant to believe that this is the “better” option and we should be grateful. With that said, I have not been able to heal from the traumas of incarceration because digital shackles are NOT alternatives to freedom. The challenges that we face are terrible, and they affect our overall health and livelihood. The constant fear and anxiety of being surveilled at all times has led me to physically and emotionally break down. ATD makes it difficult to hold a job that will be understanding of multiple check-ins on a weekly basis. This entire ATD system has been created to make it as difficult as possible for us to reintegrate back to our lives, families, and communities.

Realizing that I am not free or autonomous has caused a great deal of stress and anxiety for me. One of the worst moments was when I was celebrating my first birthday since my release, and the ankle monitor wasn't charging and it kept beeping, vibrating, and telling me to “charge battery.” It was a Friday afternoon and I was not able to get a hold of anyone to help me. It was not only embarrassing but also extremely frustrating.

This experience has definitely had a negative impact on those around me. It not only causes them stress to watch me navigate ICE supervision, but their lives also have to adjust to accommodate my schedule, restrictions, and conditional freedom.

To those that hold power, I would urge them to stop funding these systems and agencies that offer ZERO humanitarian benefits, and continue to terrorize individuals and communities through surveillance and fear. They should know that ATD and the tech that they use hold no value in restorative or healing justice that we deserve. I want people to remember that there is no such thing as “Alternatives to Detention.”

The logo features the letters 'S.A.' in a bold, orange, hand-drawn font. To the right of the letters is a stylized handprint, also in orange, with five fingers spread. The logo is set against a dark blue, curved background that resembles a shadow or a drop.

“Of course it embarrasses me to have this monitor on my ankle. I need to go out, to work, to get food, but when people see my leg monitor, they try to yell at me or even beat me. They think I did something very bad. My leg makes me not safe outside.”

I was born in Haiti. When I came to the USA in 2016, I went to Brockton, MA because my sister lives there. I lived there for about six years. When I married, my wife and her two children moved to Brockton. I worked two jobs and I supported them until I was arrested.

I spent one year in prison, and then I was released to ICE and I spent another year in ICE detention. It was my first time in prison, and when I got out in August 2021, of course I was happy to be free. But they put this ankle monitor on me, and I thought it would come off after a short while, but it didn't. Other men who were released at the same time as me had their ankle monitors removed and got an app on their phones. But they forgot about me. I am still wearing the ankle monitor today.





I still feel like I'm in jail because I can't go anywhere, can't do nothing for my family. My wife and stepchildren were evicted when I went to jail and had to move to Pennsylvania. When ICE let me visit my family, my daughter ran away crying when the ankle monitor vibrated. She was so scared.

Of course it embarrasses me to have this monitor on my ankle. I need to go out, to work, to get food, but when people see my leg monitor, they try to yell at me or even beat me. They think I did something very bad. My leg makes me not safe outside.

Sometimes I feel very depressed. I can't sleep well. The monitor vibrates and scares me and wakes me up. It hurts my ankle and causes itching and irritation. Even my foot inside my shoe hurts.

If I could talk to people in power, I would say: "Before you take the money you make selling these ankle monitors, think about the people who are suffering or may even die."

I suffer a lot, but I pray and keep trying. To other people who are suffering in ICE detention or out of detention, like me, I say: "I know your pain. Don't give up. Try to talk to someone who can help you remove it."

ANONYMOUS

“My monitor was put on loosely, so I often struggled to hide it and wearing anything but long socks made the monitor band rub against my ankles. I am pretty active in my church, and sometimes dressing up made it difficult to hide. The last thing I wanted was for people to notice, and more importantly judge.”

I am 24 years old. My immigration story begins with me being born in Mexico. I was brought over, at a very young age, to the U.S. My family and I lived in a small quiet village in Southern Illinois. I grew up in a mainly white American culture and community. I started kindergarten and graduated high school with the same community. This has really been the only culture that I have ever known. I was a dreamer, and I was able to make some of my dreams come true when DACA was introduced. I was able to get a work permit and pursue a college education.

I attended university in Illinois until 2018 when I was arrested for committing a felony and sentenced to IDOC custody. I was released in October 2020 and was on my way to complete my parole when I was detained by DHS and later transferred into ICE custody. I was moved around various locations in detention; from Illinois, to Missouri, to Indiana, and back to Illinois.



A condition of my release was having an ankle monitor and enrolling in the ISAP program with phone call check-ins, home visits, and office visits. My monitor was put on loosely, so I often struggled to hide it and wearing anything but long socks made the monitor rub against my ankles. To make the monitor easy to hide I wore straight or bootcut jeans. I am pretty active in my church, and sometimes dressing up made it difficult to hide. The last thing I wanted was for people to notice, and more importantly judge.

I had been doing my parole for 6 months before I was detained by ICE, so being placed on a monitor seemed like a huge step back. Anyone who has been in ICE custody will do anything for an opportunity to be out, be with their families, or even just to breathe fresh air. I pray that many more individuals will be able to make it out of custody. ICE decides who to release and who to place on ATD. The monitor gives you a certain sense of still being in ICE custody, but it also serves as a reminder of what I had to endure and it makes you appreciate every single moment of liberty from detention.

CARLOS

A stylized sun graphic in the top right corner, consisting of several blue brushstrokes radiating from a central point, set against a blue background that transitions into an orange background.

“I don’t feel free. I feel like I am still incarcerated—this is just another form of prison. The impact on my family has been devastating. My daughters, especially, have been deeply traumatized by it. Seeing me with the ankle monitor, getting aggressive calls from ICE every time there was a problem, and now with SmartLink, they are terrified that I will be taken from them again anytime. . . Even when this electronic surveillance ends I don’t know how or if we’ll ever be able to go back to normalcy.”

We are a family of five from Mexico, and we have been living in the Inland Empire in Southern California since before our daughters were born. I was detained and released on bond in October 2019. I have been on the ISAP program since then and it has been traumatizing not just for me, but also for my whole family. Supposedly I am free, but in reality I am not.

When I first got out of detention, they put the ankle monitor on me. It was a nightmare – it never worked properly, and they had to change the battery like ten times. ISAP officials claimed the battery would last 4-8 hours, but it always ran out after like two hours. Sometimes, I would be driving and they would call to tell me that the monitor was offline and I would have to rush home. Or the battery would start beeping and I would have to rush to change it, even in the middle of the night while my wife and I were sleeping. My family was always in fear that I could be taken away from them again.

I was supposed to be taken off the ankle monitor sooner, but because of the pandemic they said they had to keep me on longer. Finally, they told me they could take it off if I turned in my Mexican passport. But I couldn't get an appointment at the Mexican Consulate – we called every day for two months. When we finally got an appointment, they said I didn't qualify for a passport because of an error in my birth certificate. It was so frustrating, because I had the authorization to get it taken off, but I couldn't because of bureaucracy. Wherever I turned we were met with closed doors.

When they finally removed the monitor, ICE put me on SmartLink. It's still the same trauma of being controlled, being on a leash, being constantly afraid something will malfunction and I'll be re-detained. I have three kinds of phone calls with SmartLink. Every four weeks I have to check in with ICE and separately with ISAP. In addition, I have to call an automatic message center where I confirm my identity, then call back to provide a five digit code with voice recognition. I have a call almost every week. I'm supposed to be at home for the calls, so I have to take time off work. Some weeks all the calls coincide and that makes it really stressful and hard to work.

I don't feel free. I feel like I am still incarcerated – this is just another form of prison. The impact on my family has been devastating. My daughters, especially, have been deeply traumatized by it. Seeing me with the ankle monitor, getting aggressive calls from ICE every time there was a problem, and now with SmartLink, they are terrified that I will be taken from them again anytime. They ask their mom where I am and what I'm doing all the time when I'm not home. When I had my court hearing, they wanted to go with me, because they were afraid I might lose my case and be detained. My daughters were doing really well in school before, but in the last year they have been really distracted, so much so that the teachers reached out to us to connect them to therapy for their anxiety. It's been really hard for my wife, too. She calls me if I'm even a little late getting off work because she is scared that something has happened to me.

It's been almost 3 years now. I don't know how long this is going to last. I have a work permit but I don't see any possibility of getting off ISAP soon, as I was told I will continue being monitored until my immigration case is resolved, which could take months or years. Even when this electronic surveillance ends I don't know how or if we'll ever be able to go back to normalcy. This experience has been so traumatizing for my whole family that I don't think that will end even when I'm free of this system. The effects are both psychological and physical. It's been more than a year since my ankle monitor was taken off, but I continue to have problems with a nerve in my ankle - it goes numb almost every day.

I want to do anything I can so everyone can be free of electronic imprisonment. It might seem like it's impossible to stop this system, but it isn't. We can do it, and I believe that if we work together we can all be free.



CONCLUSION

As these powerful lived experiences make clear, ISAP is not an alternative to detention; it is a technological extension of it. The ongoing physical and psychological harms to people in the program cannot continue. ICE must immediately shut down its digital prisons, as well as end the detention of immigrants in all forms – complete liberation is the only path forward. There is no alternative to detention except freedom.

“To the elected officials that give billions to these surveillance companies: you are sincerely humiliating us as human beings. Put yourselves in our shoes, we did not come to harm anyone. To the people who live with this surveillance, look for organizations to support you, the strength is in unifying, do everything possible to get this removed. Fight for your rights, do not give up, and always have your dignity high.”

- M.O.

ENDNOTES

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- 8 ICE, *supra* note 1.
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- 10 Dep't of Homeland Sec., *FY2023 Budget in Brief (2022)*, https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-03/22-%201835%20-%20FY%202023%20Budget%20in%20Brief%20FINAL%20with%20Cover_Remediated.pdf at 10.
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- 12 Hesson & Rosenberg, *supra* note 10.
- 13 Bhuiyan, *supra* note 2.
- 14 Dep't of Homeland Sec., *supra* at note 9.