



# Dreamer detained

## Young Sacramento artist's arrest casts critical eye on Yuba County Jail's ICE contract

It used to seem like Miguel Gonzalez-Miranda was everywhere in Sacramento.

The multitalented artist, musician and dancer volunteered for so many activities through the Los Rios Community College system that one could wonder if he had an identical twin. He helped host art exhibitions; he set up the digital printing equipment at Sacramento City College's Makerspace; he took part in organizing numerous free music shows for the public; and he was a driving force in building a special campus space for American River College's art club.

But since mid-June, Gonzalez-Miranda hasn't been volunteering anywhere. That's because he has been sitting inside the Yuba County Jail on an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) hold.

Gonzalez-Miranda came to California as a child, joining the ranks of young undocumented immigrants known as the Dreamers. Recently, his inability to pay compounding fines dogging him since he was a teenager led to him being the latest casualty of an ongoing crackdown by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Worse yet for his friends and family, Gonzalez-Miranda is in a facility where fellow detainees have used a hunger strike to protest their conditions.

"No one that I knew, up until Miguel, had been directly affected by these so-called strong immigration policies," said Brad Carps, a friend from the art club. "Miguel is a really generous and kind person who didn't deserve this. To me, this just represents the real systematic cruelty that's going on."

When Sacramento City College professor Tom Cappelletti learned that Gonzalez-Miranda was trying to gain U.S. citizenship last February, he didn't hesitate to write a letter of support.

"He's a natural leader and he ended up being a mentor and trainer to other students," said Cappelletti, the director of Makerspace. "He's also very self-driving. I found him to be mature, responsible and extremely trustworthy."

Cappelletti remembers Gonzalez-Miranda showing him paperwork indicating he had

unpaid fines stemming from a misdemeanor incident when he was a teenager. Cappelletti said Gonzalez-Miranda owed roughly \$8,000 or \$9,000 due to mounting penalties. Sacramento court records do not shed light on what the misdemeanor was.

According to friends of Gonzalez-Miranda, on June 4, he was babysitting his younger brother when ICE agents seized him at his home in Sacramento.

Roderic Agbunag, a counselor at American River College, says that the school has a scholarship program and club for undocumented students and that Gonzalez-Miranda is well-known in those circles. According to Agbunag, the way ICE agents seized him has cast a shadow of fear over other Dreamers on campus.

"The other undocumented students, it affects them, too," Agbunag said. "They're saying to themselves, 'All of this is actually on our doorstep now. Our own community member is just suddenly gone.' It makes it really hard for these students to focus on being academically sound and successful."

**Two weeks ago, more than 20 community organizations** held a roundtable conference at Rep. Dorris Matsui's office in Sacramento on ending what they call ICE's child internment camps. The meeting came after reports that the Trump administration was planning another series of sweeping enforcement raids. One strategy advocates favored was pressuring local governments to end contracts with ICE to use county jails as detention centers, a move the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors pulled the trigger on last year.

Since then, many detainees, Gonzalez-Miranda included, have been sent to Yuba County Jail.

Yuba County has a \$6.5 million annual contract with the federal government, even though its jail has been under a judge's consent decree to improve conditions since 1976. According to the Sacramento Immigration Coalition, condi-

Miguel Gonzales-Miranda  
PHOTO COURTESY OF LOS RIOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

tions at the facility remain a problem after 40 years of legal pressure, which is especially true of the ICE detention center that's existed there since 2008. Evidence of that, the coalition says, can be seen in the recent seven-day hunger strike that 15 detainees went on over lack of jail staffing, unsafe conditions and lack of medical and mental health care.

"There are cells that have no water, the lights are not working, pretty much the cells are dilapidated," detainee Briant Pineda wrote in Spanish in a letter, which was translated by the immigration coalition.

To some extent, independent investigations bear out those claims. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of Detention and Compliance recently determined in its own inspections that Yuba's jail was "deficient" in regard to 14 of its 23 major standards. The report was first obtained by the immigration coalition through a Freedom of Information Act request and later summarized by the California Attorney General's Office. The AG conducted a one-day inspection of the jail in February, but relied on outside organizations and previous reports to highlight concerns about its medical services and whether it has appropriate "sexual abuse and assault prevention and intervention standards."

At a press conference during the hunger strike, the immigration coalition's Mahmoud Zahriya highlighted the irony.

"ICE officials are writing and expressing how poor of a job Yuba County does in monitoring its own jail," Zahriya stressed. "If ICE is pointing fingers at Yuba County, you know conditions at this facility are extremely bad."

In a press release put out in February during a different detainee hunger strike, Yuba County Sheriff Wendell Anderson stressed that his facility was "in compliance with National Detention Standards" and that detainees had access to education programs, counseling and addiction treatment.

Anderson also noted that some of those on ICE holds in his facility were connected to past serious criminal offenses, including aggravated assault, sexual assault, domestic violence, carjacking, kidnapping, false imprisonment, robbery, weapons charges, attempted murder and murder. The sheriff cited at least 73 detainees in his facility at that time that had such convictions in their backgrounds.

Rhonda Rios Kravitz, who works with immigrant advocacy group STEP UP Sacramento, however, emphasizes that the detainees are mostly men and women who have paid their debts to society. She's also convinced many are being deported over relatively minor offenses, in some cases far in their pasts—like Gonzalez-Miranda.

For such detainees, STEP UP Sacramento wants ICE to move to a system where those on immigration holds would be in alternatives to detention. That means they'd be housed with willing community members while on a monitoring program until their cases are resolved.

"These are not people who have been arrested for a crime, they are in custody on a civil hold," Kravitz said. "There are better alternatives and these programs are way more cost-effective than the kind of detention centers that are at the Yuba County Jail."

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