

Statement of Habiba Soliman, 18-year-old ICE detainee—Jan 6, 2026

Some only see the last name me and my family share with my father, not the separate lives we spent three years building. To the authorities, we are guilty only by association. They don't see us as individuals with our own dreams. We are six innocent people—including five-year-old twins—trapped in a nightmare we didn't create and punished for our father's actions.

We came to the US for personal family reasons. The move was very hard for every single one of us. Like many other immigrant families, we had to work really hard to adapt to the new environment. Struggling with the English language, school, and day to day tasks are every immigrant's secret battles. But like a lot of people, we overcame these challenges and we tried our best to give back to our community. My brother and I used to volunteer in community food drives and my mother and I taught English to other struggling immigrants. As a family, my mom always encouraged us to look for ways to help other people, and to have a good relationship with everyone, regardless of their religion, race, or ethnicity. And finally, after 3 years of hard work, we were all relatively settled. Things were finally becoming routine and we were all trying to improve our lives. Then, the worst nightmare that none of us could have expected or even imagined came into our life. A sudden, dramatic, awful change of events. In one minute our entire lives were changed.

It's June 1st. My mother was working on her legal case in a cafe. My brother was hiking with his friends. I was babysitting the 8-year-old and the 4-year-old twins while watching movies. Around 1 pm, several police cars showed up in the neighborhood. Worried, I called my mom to tell her. She said that maybe it was a follow-up from yesterday's incident, since there was a fight in the neighborhood the night before. 2 hours later, more police cars showed up and some of them blocked our parking lot. At 3 pm my brother came home and was wondering why there were so many police cars in the neighborhood? Suddenly, I heard a different ringtone in the house. I went to check where it was coming from and I ended up finding my dad's phone and wallet in a bag under the desk. I checked the phone and my mom was calling. I picked it up, astonished. My mom was confused; how was I answering my dad's phone--who was supposedly working at that time? I was worried so I told my mom to come back home. However, when she arrived the police blocked her car and surrounded her.

I ran to the window to see what was happening and I saw police officers and officers wearing FBI vests. They told my mom that they have nothing against her, but that she has to go with them for an issue concerning her husband. My mom asked if my father was alive, because she was worried he might have gotten into a car accident. My dad used to say that his reason for not coming back home at night is being very tired and afraid of dying in a car accident. So that is why death was the first thing that popped in my mother's head when the officer mentioned my father. The officers said he was fine and that he was being held in Boulder. Then my mom told the officers that my father's phone was inside the house, and offered to bring it with her. The officers were surprised that his phone was with us and told her to take it with her to the police station.

While they were there I called to check on them. My brother said that when he asked the officer if the issue was bad, he said yes it is very bad. Hearing this my brother thought that if it was that bad it might be on the news. So we both looked up colorado news and that was how we found out. I couldn't believe the articles. I didn't think it was possible for my very quiet, peaceful father to do something so outrageous, until I saw the video. The person in that video may have looked like my father, but I couldn't believe that this was the person I knew.

Throughout our entire lives, my mom did most things concerning me and my siblings. While my dad was mostly responsible for the financial support. We always appreciated him working hard to feed and support 7 people, which was never an easy task. My dad is a man of few words. He does not share his thoughts or concerns with us or with anyone in his family. We never find out if he is sick or has any problems with work except by accident. We would find a bag of medicine under his name, or mail that is addressed to him. My mom used to always beg him to open up to her and to share his worries and thoughts with her. Nonetheless, she always fails. My father never changed and I don't think he ever opened up to anybody. At least not us, his family. His answer to any question is "I am fine" even if he is not.

The FBI told us they wanted to search the house so we had to stay in a hotel for that first night. That night none of us were able to sleep. My mother didn't eat or sleep for 3 days. She was continuously crying and repeating "this can't be true, that is not my husband". We were trying to not scare the little ones who still thought their father was working, and that he would bring them candy when he comes back on Monday. I was thinking about how he could possibly do that? How could he hurt all these innocent people? How could he completely abandon us like that? The father I knew had no hatred or grudge for anyone whatsoever. How could he change 180 degrees from a passive person who wouldn't even take action for issues concerning his family, to a person that is fighting and making crazy tremendous actions.

But what was actually insane, was that he was acting completely normal before the incident. At my graduation, he was actually there celebrating with me. Little did any of us know that behind his happy face, was a plan that will destroy everything.

We spent 2 days at the hotel, not knowing that they would be our last days of freedom for a long time.

Just like other people, we were lied to by DHS (Department of Homeland Security) and ICE agents. On the third day, they told us that staying in the hotel was dangerous and that we should go to another hotel for our safety. Only two Homeland security agents got us from inside the hotel, while 15 others were waiting for us outside.

We drove for an hour to Florence still believing that we were going to a hotel. To our surprise we arrived at a place in the middle of nowhere. We drove into a garage and watched it close behind us. We felt trapped. We thought we got kidnapped. We were in two cars surrounded by strangers that we don't even know if they are police or not. The ICE agents didn't show their badges or identify themselves at all until we got inside and saw the holding cells. They took our phones and all of our property, and we stayed for more than 8 hours in a cold cell. It was the beginning of the end. We were overcome with terror. We tried to explain that we had a case, and that it was pending. But ICE officers didn't even seem to hear us.

While we were waiting, we saw another detained man in the cell in front us. He refused to put his fingerprints in the system. So the ICE agents chose to use force with him, pinning him on the ground and forcing his fingers on the device. There were three of them and they were aggressively roughing up a man half their size. It was so bad that after they were done, to the point that the detainee couldn't walk straight.

Meanwhile, every single one of us watched in horror thinking that we were next. The twins were only 4 years old then and they were crying hysterically when the agents called on our mother, but fortunately they told us that they would only use that type of force with us if we refused to follow their orders.

In the cell we were all worried, trying to make sense of what happened. But everything happened so fast that nothing had really sunk in yet. We were devastated. The agents told us that it was a nice family facility, where we will stay until we have our court. They told us that in the facility they will take away all of our property and our phones. We were worried that we won't have any connection to the outside world for almost a month. For a moment that was our biggest worry.

From the cell to the Dilley detention facility, we have been followed everywhere by 7 people. At that time we were just feeling numb. Our entire lives had been flipped in a matter of hours. None of us were actually able to understand or process the things that were happening to us.

When we finally got to the facility in the middle of the night, the sight of the facility didn't exactly match the "nice family facility" the ICE agents told us about, but rather more of a prison than anything. We were thinking how we have never done anything to deserve this, especially the 4 and the 8 year olds, who haven't even lived their childhood yet like other normal kids.

After dropping us off, one of the escorts that accompanied us said, "Be strong. No matter what happens, you have to be strong. Just remember that". Her words scared me more than it gave me hope. We went in expecting to get out after 24 days, but unfortunately they didn't tell us the whole story. They didn't tell us that we will have one court after another and that it would be near impossible for us to get out.

The things we had to endure in the facility itself are a whole different story. We have been fighting and struggling to get the most basic things like food, medicine and even clothes. It was surprising to see the amount of heartless people that worked in the facility. I am not saying that there aren't any nice people here, but the truth is that only 10% of these officers have ever treated us like humans. I could never understand why it is so hard for some people to be just a little nice. It doesn't take a lot of effort. The officers talk arrogantly and treat the residents like they are nothing, as if just because we are detained we are not humans anymore. Their actions would be anywhere from eating lollipops and candy in front of the little kids, knowing that they all want some but can never get any, to criticizing officers who treat residents like humans and telling them "you don't have to do all that, if they have a problem they can figure it out on their own".

The facility claims that it has great food and great medical service, but the reality is different. We see kids everyday including my own siblings crying because they want different food, and they can't eat the same thing again for the 100th time. Many people were hospitalized and rushed to the emergency because they weren't given the treatment they needed. I struggled to get new glasses for 4 months and I'm currently staying without glasses. My brother himself had appendicitis, and when he went to the medical department, he wasn't even seen by a doctor, he was only checked by a nurse who told him "leave and come back in 3 days if you still have the pain". He was finally taken to actually be seen after he threw up in the waiting room and begged the nurse that he couldn't even walk from the pain.

Our days here are defined by lines. We wait two hours to get a computer and one hour for food three times a day. It takes a three-hour wait just to get one dose of medicine, which we need at least twice a day—after we have already waited three hours to get it prescribed. If we need to buy anything we stand for three hours outside the commissary to buy very expensive, off-brand, low-quality items. Our whole day is spent running from one line to the next; they manage to keep us very busy waiting that by the end of the day, we have no energy left. The place is overcrowded; more people arrive everyday while no one is released. The services of the place simply can't support this huge amount of people. It is a mess everywhere.

If we had a complaint or a request, it would take days or even months for someone to get back to us. And when they get back they give us nothing. But if we are lucky, they will give us false promises. We would have to go from one person to the other to get anything. In the end we might not even get our needs taken care of because of ridiculous reasons. For example, apparently we can't get hats in the sunny heat of Texas, just because it is winter season now, while the officer himself was wearing a hat.

To talk about the devastating stories that we hear here would require a whole different article. It is heart breaking to hear everyone's story and see them struggling.

And here we have been detained since June 4th. Having one court after another. Praying that we get out soon. Looking for small happy moments in the absolute darkness. Trying to survive day by day, while completely losing it some days. Thanking God everyday for the great people who stood by us and who supported us in the hardest time of our lives.

We believe that what happened to the victims of the attack is dreadful. That no one ever should experience what they have experienced. Violence is never justified. And we condemn every one that uses violence including my father.

We are paying for something that we had absolutely no knowledge of. What my father did goes against everything me and my family believe in. If I had known I would have definitely tried to stop him. I would have stopped him from hurting others, hurting himself and hurting us. My dream is to go to Harvard Medical School and become a doctor. I want to help others. I want to make a change. I would have never expected to go from a girl who was doing everything to achieve her dreams, to a girl that had her life destroyed just because of her father. I can't have a goal to help people and at the same time participate or even approve of hurting others.

What makes our situation worse is that the DHS and ICE insist on detaining us with no evidence. They chose to not investigate. They chose to ignore the results of the FBI investigation that shows we did not know anything. They ignored the investigation that went on for more than 20 hours. We explained that my father doesn't come home except one day per week. He sleeps in his car and we don't talk to him that much. And as written in the FBI's transcript, he bought all the equipment on his way to the scene. We couldn't have possibly suspected anything. We have tons of evidence proving our innocence and the DHS is choosing to close their eyes. They are choosing to ignore the evidence of our innocence.

Staying detained drains us physically and mentally. The place has serious effects on the kids, like waking up in the middle of the night and screaming for 2 hours.

After waiting for 7 months, we didn't even get a fair trial. Our lawyer had to withdraw because of health issues so we told the judge we needed a lawyer to represent us. We told her that we are not lawyers and that we have a right to counsel. She, however, denied our request for more time and forced us to proceed "pro se" violating our right to due process. All she said was "we are moving forward with this case". She then decided to read out our applications to us, and asked us if we wanted to change anything. And then suddenly, she told us she denied our case. She said it was because we missed 2 sub-questions on our applications and that it was incomplete. We couldn't believe what we were hearing. She said she read the applications to us and allowed us to change them but we didn't. We tried to explain to her that just reading the questions and not explaining them doesn't help. We told her that if she asked us the questions directly we would have answered. She then adjourned the court and left us all in shock of how unfair the entire trial was. To deny our case for a minor error, without a lawyer present, is not the justice we were promised.

We stood alone against the DHS. The judge expected us to be our own representatives, while the government sat across from us with professional counsel. The trial was over before it began because we were never equal.

I don't know when or how our detention will end. I don't know if it's a happy or a sad ending. I don't know how we will deal with the effects that this place imposed on us. I don't know how the victims can recover from what happened to them.

But I know one thing: the truth never dies. We just need more people who are willing to spend the time and effort to find it. I just hope that when the truth comes out that it is not too late and that the damage is fixable.

We are fighting because we know we are innocent. What happened is terrible but there is no point in destroying the life of six innocent humans. We pray for someone to look at us not as the family of a man who is accused of terrorism, but as humans who deserve to live freely.