



OIDO

Office of the Immigration
Detention Ombudsman

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A

CASE MANAGER

CHRIS' STORY – A fictional account of what OIDO's case team might do in a day.

OIDO's unique mission space—focused entirely on the conditions of detention—allows its case managers to bring humanity and personal connection to the context of civil immigration detention. While system-wide problems in immigration detention can be addressed by policy changes, and facility-specific problems can be addressed by enforcing existing policies and standards, problems at the individual level call for human-to-human engagement. OIDO case managers address individual concerns about the conditions of their detention, providing an objective evaluation of each complaint. It is important to consider that many detainees may be new to detention, confused about the process, and may have limited English proficiency; at the same time, it must be determined whether complaints are based on actual violations of detention standards or perhaps a misunderstanding of detention practices.

What does a case manager do? Case managers objectively evaluate complaints raised by individual detainees to ensure humane conditions and a fair process. To break that down and give a feel for what it is like to be a case manager, OIDO offers Chris' story—a fictional account of what OIDO's case team might do in a day.

All over the country, complaints are coming in from detainees, their legal representatives, or others concerned about how an individual is being treated while in immigration detention. Chris has been assigned to work at a single large facility and takes cases originating there as they are assigned. Other case managers rotate among several facilities. His facility is in a remote area with few amenities, so Chris packs lunch every day.

At the end of 2021, OIDO fully staffed 3 facilities like Chris', and 12 additional facilities were served by rotating case managers.

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In October 2021, DHS Secretary Mayorkas asked that each component develop a victim-centered approach for interacting with detainees.

Chris has been well prepared for the job. In addition to the necessary basic skills, Chris has been trained on how to incorporate a victim-centered and trauma-aware approach to working with administrative detainees. After all, most of the people he engages with are being detained while decisions are made as to their status in the United States. Immigration detention is not punitive but dictated by administrative considerations including legal requirements requiring custody in certain circumstances. Chris is also trained on immigration law and policy, detention standards, the core principles of an ombudsman's office, privacy, and professional conduct.

Gaining appropriate access to the detention facility itself is Chris' first priority, and it involves several layers. Although Congress gave case managers like Chris unfettered access to detention facilities and detainees as well as to the information needed to do their jobs, OIDO's role is new to some facilities. Chris is happy that he has developed a mutually respectful relationship with detention facility staff. They know why Chris is there, and they are responsive. They have found private space for Chris to interview detainees, and they cooperate in trying to resolve problems as best they can. He's heard from colleagues managing cases in other parts of the country that they are still establishing a rapport with the facility staff.

When selecting which cases to handle first, the triage process makes medical care a priority. Chris' first case of the day involves a detainee who alleges that she had not received her prescription medicine. As usual with any new case, Chris evaluates all angles by asking what steps the detainee has taken to seek redress and then by working with the facility to discuss its medical care and approach to the case. Chris learns that the facility had not yet received the medical file from her previous location, which has caused the delay in prescribing the appropriate medicine. He sorts things out after a few phone calls and will follow up to make sure the medicine reaches her.

**Approximately 24% of
complaints received by OIDO
involve medical needs.**

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On several occasions in 2021, the Detention Oversight team chose to inspect a facility based on data provided by case managers.

Concern about COVID-19 is constant. Chris, facility staff, and detainees are all aware that precautions need to be taken. Yet, two of the complaints for that day involve an inability to social distance due to crowding. During lunch, Chris learns that two other case managers heard the same complaint at other facilities. The detention standards applicable to the facility date from before the pandemic and do not explicitly or comprehensively cover COVID-19 protocols, but Chris knows that the contract for this facility requires adherence to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines adopted by ICE. When engaging with facility management about these complaints, Chris learns that the overcrowding is due to a temporary increase in detainee numbers while arranging transfers to another facility. Chris works with the individuals and the facility to ensure that they are housed appropriately and then refers the issue to OIDO's Detention Oversight Division because this "temporary" issue has been a recurring one at this facility.

Access to legal counsel comprises approximately 8% of complaints.

A common concern among detainees at this facility has been the inability to communicate with legal counsel. Chris learns that the latest complaint—that many telephones in the facility don't work—is not an isolated one. With the cooperation of the staff, Chris can inventory all the telephones, determine which ones are working, make facility staff aware of the issues, and arrange for telephone calls for the individuals who complained. While managing a variety of cases, Chris makes note of patterns, trying to identify possible systemic issues that might contribute to common complaints. Chris will raise these observations at the next meetings with OIDO's Detention Oversight Division, which may decide to do a site visit, and with its Policy and Standards team, which might have relevant experts available to eventually develop recommendations to ICE for strengthening detention standards.

OIDO's External Relations Division conducts "listening sessions" with local and national non-governmental organizations representing and providing social services for detainees, and Chris makes a note to raise any issues to their attention that might require follow-up with stakeholders.

Any recommendations OIDO makes are informed by what is happening on the ground.

