

**NINA MOINI:** We're going to turn now to the story of a Burnsville woman who's in immigration detention and in need of surgery. Federal immigration officers arrested 23-year-old Andrea Pedro-Francisco in early February, a week before she was scheduled to have a cyst removed from an ovary. Members of Congress have taken up her cause, but they've not been able to reach her. That's partly due to a measles lockdown at Camp East Montana in Texas, where she's being held.

This is all in a story published yesterday by the Minnesota Reformer deputy editor Max Nesterak, who joins me now to share his reporting with us. Thanks for being here, Max.

**MAX** Thanks so much for having me on, Nina.

**NESTERAK:**

**NINA MOINI:** Can you start by telling us a little bit about Andrea Pedro-Francisco?

**MAX** So she came with her mother from Guatemala, entered in 2019, when she was just 16 years old. And they really came with nothing, but have since built a life in Minnesota. They both clean houses. They have a home in Burnsville. They got really involved in their church. She plays the bass guitar and sings. And she was actually on the way to work when she was pulled over with her mom and a neighbor going to clean houses.

**NESTERAK:**

They don't know why, but they were stopped, a car parked in front, a car parked in back. A half a dozen masked agents got out. And they took her and the neighbor. But they let her mom go.

Her mom has two other young children-- a five-year-old, a one-year-old-- who are Americans. And she pleaded with one of the agents, there's no one to take care of my young children. And remarkably, he let her go, but with a warning, saying, if you are found again, you're going to be taken.

**NINA MOINI:** So what do you know about the condition of Andrea's health right now?

**MAX** So what I know is that she was scheduled for surgery about, like you said, a week before she was arrested in early February. It's a cyst on one of the ovaries about the size of a tennis ball. The pain had been so severe that her doctor had actually prescribed her oxycodone.

**NESTERAK:**

But since being taken to detention in Texas, she-- really, only within a couple hours of being detained in Minnesota, she was shipped to Texas to Camp East Montana, which has become kind of a notorious ICE detention facility. It's ICE's largest. It's been under lockdown for measles outbreaks. There's also been a tuberculosis outbreak. COVID-19 has circulated.

And right now, she's told me-- the last I spoke to her was over Zoom on Thursday. She said she had started receiving a couple medications-- birth control, an antidepressant. But the only thing she's received is Tylenol for the pain. And she is requesting to be seen by a doctor. That's what her attorneys wants. US Representative Angie Craig has gotten involved, sending inquiries, trying to get status on what is her status now more than a month after she was supposed to have this surgery.

**NINA MOINI:** What do you know about what type of medical care is offered inside? It sounds like they're offering her the solution of self-deportation as well.

**MAX NESTERAK:** Well, that's right. She says she's in East Camp-- Camp East Montana is made out of tents. It's three-- six long tent structures. She says she's in a room with about 60 other individuals. And they're only allowed if they have a court hearing or a phone call or an hour a day when they're chained together and taken outside.

She was taken to the hospital a couple days after arrival, where she said a doctor confirmed her condition and-- but declined to operate on her, given that she is in Immigration custody. When I talked to her last, she had also been seen by a man in detention who had done an ultrasound. He would not give her his name.

She's also requested her own medical records to show her attorneys of what has been done to her in the center. But they have not provided her those documents. She also needs to sign a release for her medical records to be released to her attorneys. But she can't do that because under-- her doctor here in Minnesota is saying, we need an ink signature.

Well, there's nowhere to print a form, let alone sign one or buy envelopes and stamps to get out. And there's no one to bring her the form because no one's allowed in because of the measles outbreak. So she's really not only suffering this medical emergency, but in this Kafkaesque bureaucracy that's making her difficult to communicate with her attorneys, communicate with lawmakers who are trying to help her.

**NINA MOINI:** What types of barriers did you have to overcome to even report this story? It sounds like you've been able to speak with Andrea.

**MAX NESTERAK:** Yeah. So I was able to get on a Zoom call to interview her, to spend about an hour talking with her. I've also spoke with her mother, who's still in Minnesota, and her attorney and US Representative Angie Craig, who, like I said, is-- been working to try and get care to Andrea.

Interestingly, when I was talking to Representative Craig, she said, I sent inquiries to the top legislative DHS official. And I got a bounce-back citing the partial shutdown. Of course, Democrats are withholding votes to renew funding for DHS until they get serious reforms to ICE. And so there's an irony there that Craig says, I'm trying to conduct oversight, and they're saying, oh, we can't provide you information because of the partial shutdown.

**NINA MOINI:** It's a lot of challenges, it sounds like. What do you know about the legal case that is unfolding? Where is it at? How much longer could it be in motion?

**MAX NESTERAK:** So Andrea's-- has this volunteer team of lawyers who have filed what's called a habeas corpus petition to challenge her detention to-- and it says-- basically, it says the government has to explain and show cause for why she's in detention. Now, that was filed in Texas because by the time that she got legal representation, she was already out of state.

In Minnesota, I reported recently there's been over 1,000 of these habeas corpus petitions filed since the beginning of Operation Metro Surge. And in Minnesota, the vast majority have been successful, where federal judges ruling that you can't hold people without bond or you can't hold people indefinitely in detention if you've conducted a warrantless arrest and they lived in the country for a number of years, which is Andrea's situation.

In Texas, the judge gave-- normally, the government has to respond to one of these habeas petitions within three days. But the judge in this case gave the government more than three weeks after she was detained to respond. And they responded with-- by saying she doesn't have permission to live in the country, so she can be held indefinitely. She is "seeking admission," as if she were just apprehended at the border, even though she's lived in the country, pursuing asylum for a number of years.

Right now, we are just waiting for that judge to decide whether he sides with the government or the attorneys on whether she can be detained indefinitely or pending immigration proceedings. It's unclear what will happen. Many listeners may know the Fifth Circuit court of Appeals, which covers Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi, ruled that-- in favor of the Trump administration, the Trump administration's policy of mandatory detention, even though the vast majority of federal judges, both conservative and liberal, have ruled against it. So that makes it more challenging that she's bringing her case in Texas because there's this Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling in favor of holding immigrants in detention pending their immigration proceedings.

**NINA MOINI:** And just lastly, Max, did you get a sense that Andrea is OK? I hope it doesn't happen, but if there was a serious emergency with this cyst, did you get the impression through talking with her and your reporting that she would be able to go and have an emergency procedure done?

**MAX**  
**NESTERAK:** I'm not sure. I'm not sure. When I talked to her-- I have to say, I didn't know her before she was in detention. But I've seen pictures. And just seeing her on the screen, she just looks so-- she did not look well. She looked ashen, downcast. Honestly, it was painful to see her in that condition, even though-- even not knowing her, and just seeing pictures before she went into detention.

I'm not sure right now. I know that the Trump administration is changing the contractor of that facility because there's been so many complaints about medical issues in this Camp East Montana.

**NINA MOINI:** Well, thank you for following this and continuing to follow this story for us. We appreciate your time, Max.

**MAX**  
**NESTERAK:** Thank you so much for having me on.

**NINA MOINI:** Max Nesterak is deputy editor of the Minnesota Reformer.