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IMMIGRATION

# ICE eyes selling mega-warehouses purchased for mass detention

The agency is also considering selling several planes ICE purchased for deportations under former Secretary Kristi Noem, but no decisions have been made.

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— An aerial view of a warehouse purchased by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Salt Lake City, photographed on April 9. Justin Sullivan / Getty Images

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By **Julia Ainsley and Laura Strickler**

WASHINGTON – The Trump administration is looking into selling some of the large warehouses that Immigration and Customs Enforcement had [purchased earlier this year](#) to serve as mega-detention centers for immigrants, according to two Department of Homeland Security officials.



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DHS and ICE officials have identified several of the eleven previously purchased warehouses, some of which were expected to be repurposed to hold as many as 8,000 immigrants, for potential sale, the officials said. But, they said, the facilities have not yet been put on the market, and no final decisions have been made on the matter.

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The warehouses were purchased under former Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem as part of a plan to build the capacity to detain 100,000 immigrants across the country at a single time. They were in addition to existing facilities capable of detaining tens of thousands of immigrants. The total cost of the warehouse purchases was [estimated at over \\$38 billion](#).

The DHS officials also said that ICE is considering selling several planes that were purchased or leased under Noem's leadership, [including a luxury Boeing 737 Max 8](#), though no decision has been made. ICE has typically used chartered planes for deportations; those purchased during Noem's tenure were the first deportation planes to be government-owned.

The discussions about potentially offloading assets acquired to help carry out President Donald Trump's mass deportation policy underscores the cultural shift that has taken shape inside DHS since Secretary Markwayne Mullin began leading the agency. Trump has also said he may want a "softer touch" on immigration enforcement following the fatal shootings of two U.S. citizens during immigration enforcement in Minneapolis in January.

The DHS officials said ICE no longer needs the capacity to hold 100,000 immigrants.

"Under new leadership, DHS is assessing all our resources, including aircraft, to maximize efficiency and continue to deliver on President Trump's mission of securing the homeland for all Americans," a DHS spokesperson said in a statement when asked about the potential sale of warehouses.

"Secretary Mullin is 100% focused on ensuring the needs of our department are met while being the best possible steward of taxpayer dollars," the spokesperson said. "As with any transition, we are reviewing agency policies and proposals."

The so-called mega-warehouses gained public attention and drew protests at their proposed sites around the country, often dividing local communities about whether they would help create jobs or drag down their economies. Even several Republicans opposed ICE warehouses that were planned for their districts. [Maryland sued successfully](#) to stop ICE from developing a warehouse near Hagerstown. Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., criticized DHS' plan to turn a warehouse in Byhalia, Mississippi, into an ICE detention center.

The DHS spokesperson said Mullin is committed to working with community leaders as the issue unfolds, adding, "We want to be good partners."

NBC News was first to report that ICE was [considering purchasing warehouses](#) during Noem's tenure, and that ICE put a [pause on new warehouse purchases](#) after Mullin stepped into the role of secretary in March.

If ICE sells any of its warehouses, their market value could come under scrutiny. The DHS inspector general is examining ICE's purchases of warehouses around the country as part of an audit examining whether DHS met the need for new detention space in a "cost-effective manner."

A lawsuit filed by Social Circle, Georgia – a suburb of Atlanta – alleges ICE paid more than five times the property's previously assessed value.

The [town filed the suit in mid-May](#) after ICE bought one warehouse there in a move that was widely opposed by local officials.

At the time the lawsuit was filed, DHS said Mullin was in the process of reviewing agency policies and proposals and stressed that the new secretary wanted to work with community leaders about their concerns.

Social Circle City Manager Eric Taylor told NBC News the town sued to stop the ICE warehouse from opening in the community.

“We are a quaint, small Southern town, and this would triple the population overnight and have all kinds of strain on our water and sewer infrastructure,” Taylor said.

Taylor said he was happy to hear ICE might be changing its warehouse plan but was skeptical that would ultimately happen, adding that he wants it in writing from DHS.

“That’s great news,” he said. “I’ll believe it when I see it.”



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