

21. Marie Ange Blaise

Who was Marie Ange Blaise? Marie Blaise was a 44-year-old Haitian woman who lived in the Charlotte, North Carolina area with her son, Kervens Blaise.

How did Marie Ange Blaise end up in ICE custody? According to the agency, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) encountered her on Feb. 12 at the international airport in Saint Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Two days later, CBP transferred her to ICE custody in San Juan, Puerto Rico. On April 5, she was transferred to the detention center in Pompano Beach, Fla. She died there nearly three weeks later.

How did Marie Ange Blaise die under ICE custody? Hours before she died, Marie's son spoke to his mother on the phone, according to the medical examiner's report. "She complained of having chest pains and abdominal cramps, and when she asked the detention staff to see a physician, they refused her." Marie had been having chest pain for about a month, her son told investigators. He also told Broward investigators that she said she couldn't get a doctor to see her on the day of her death.

Human Rights Watch interviewed a Honduran woman who witnessed Marie's death from a nearby cell. The group interviewed her before she was deported, under the pseudonym "Rosa," to protect her identity and immigration case. "After Marie collapsed, we started yelling for help, but the guards ignored us," Rosa said. "Finally, one officer approached slowly, looked at her without intervening, and then walked away. After that, it took eight minutes for the medical provider to arrive, and then another 15 or 20 before the rescue team came. By then, she was not moving."

Marie Ange Blaise was pronounced dead shortly after.

What happened after Marie Ange Blaise's death? Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Miramar has pressed ICE for an investigation. In May, after she and Rep. Frederica Wilson, D-Miami Gardens, toured the facility, she said in a statement that she "failed to see any evidence that there were proper procedures in place and that adequate health care was provided. One single doctor to care for hundreds of detainees — with some being forced to sleep on the floor — is inhumane," she said. "Marie Blaise's tragic death will not be a one-off if these cruel conditions persist."

Sources:

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