

5. Bryan Garzón-Rayó

Who was Bryan Garzón-Rayó? Bryan was a 27 year old immigrant from Colombia. He loved zipping around on his motorcycle, watching soccer with friends and sledding down Art Hill in St. Louis, Missouri during a fresh snowfall. Most of all, his mother said, he was devoted to his family, and he fought tooth and nail to ensure they would have a better life here than in their native Colombia. Lucy Garzón, his soft-spoken 45-year-old mother, speaks matter-of-factly about her life and struggles, including starting her life in a new country. Her family's time in Bogotá became more and more challenging over a span of months. It ultimately reached a breaking point at the end of 2023 after they received growing threats of violence and harassment from law enforcement. She loved Bogotá, but the situation had become untenable. "We know [in Colombia], there may be laws, and you may be able to sue, but nothing will happen," the single mom said, noting the struggles with femicide.

Early November 2023, Lucy Garzón and her four children reached the San Ysidro, California, port of entry. "We were being treated like livestock," she said of the interactions with the ICE agents at the border. "They threw my son's money on the ground and made him pick it up on his knees." While Lucy Garzón and three of her children were quickly released into the U.S., border officials held Bryan Garzón-Rayó behind for months. By the time the family reunited and settled in St. Louis, their fear of immigration officials had left its mark. Still, they clung to hope, determined to build a new life together as the family's asylum cases worked through the legal system.

"Mom, you have to live life because you never know," Lucy Garzón recalled her son telling her. "One day you may be here, and the next you may not."

How did Bryan Garzón-Rayó end up in ICE detention? In May 2024, Brayan was charged with shoplifting in Shrewsbury. He missed a court hearing in January. In March 2025, the St. Louis circuit attorney's office charged Garzón-Rayó with a misdemeanor for credit card fraud. Roughly two weeks after the credit card incident, Garzón-Rayó and his sister Deisy Garzón noticed several police officers taking pictures of their vehicles outside their home. Brayan went to find out what was going on. That is when police handcuffed him and put him in the back of a police vehicle. Video of the March arrest obtained by St. Louis Public Radio shows Lucy and Deisy Garzón repeatedly asking several St. Louis Metropolitan Police officers what was going on and why they were arresting Brayan.

ICE arrested Garzón-Rayó on March 25, 2025, after he spent a day in police custody and transported him 100 miles to the Phelps County Jail. There, Bryan's daily calls with his mother became a lifeline. Garzón-Rayó did not appear to have a public defender or private attorney representing him in either municipal case, according to court documents. A spokesperson for St. Louis circuit courts said that public defenders and other options for legal representation are assigned at the first hearing. Garzón-Rayó's first appearance would have been on April 23, 2025.

How did Bryan Garzón-Rayó die under ICE custody? The mother and son had their routine call on April 3rd. Lucy Garzón remembers her son complaining of stomach pains and about the

poor quality of the jail's food. He asked her to send money to his commissary account. Brayan also said he'd received medical care for stomach issues.

Another detainee told Lucy Garzón that her son had become incredibly anxious and was taken out of his cell along with his belongings. He didn't know when Brayan would return. "He tried to take his own life, and he's in a Rolla hospital," Lucy Garzón remembers the jail worker told her. A worker at the jail told Lucy Garzón her son had hanged himself with a bedsheet in his cell and was found unresponsive. The worker then told her that Garzón-Rayó was revived and transported to Phelps Health Hospital. "He is going to be transported to a St. Louis hospital at 3 a.m. by helicopter because his situation is critical, and he may die tomorrow."

Another detainee told her that her son had previously thrown himself down a flight of stairs in an attempt to injure himself. The detainee told the mother that Garzón-Rayó would also violently throw up, and others would yell and smack the cell bars for help from guards which never came.

What happened after Bryan's death? Following Brayan's death, Lucy Garzón said other jail detainees began to reach out to her with condolences and to share concerns over the conditions at the Phelps County Jail. The mother recalls one detainee telling her they would have rather received the death penalty than spend time there.

"Indirectly, they pushed him to do this," said Lucy Garzón. "He didn't have the drive to kill himself. He didn't have a reason to do so. He was a young and healthy man. Yes, he had difficulties like every family, but not to take his life."

Lucy and Deisy Garzón lamented that there have been more questions than answers surrounding Garzón-Rayó's death. "The only people who have meaningfully reached out to us are the organ donation people and the hospital," Lucy Garzón said. "The only thing the police spoke with me about was to put me in touch with someone from ICE to pick up his things."

The Phelps County Sheriff's Department, which runs the jail, did not respond to a list of questions about the alleged poor conditions at the jail, or if Garzón-Rayó was in solitary confinement, or if he harmed himself in the days before his death, or if he was on suicide watch. His mother said she will keep fighting to learn what happened to her son and prevent it from happening to other families.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro [has called for a formal diplomatic protest of the United States government](#) in response to Brayan Garzón-Rayó's death in the Rolla jail.

Sources:

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