

27. Emmanuel Damas

Who was Emmanuel Damas? Emmanuel Damas was a 56-year-old Haitian father of two who grew up in Les Cayes in southern Haiti with his twin younger brothers and their mother. Mr. Damas was a handyman in Haiti before coming to the United States. His brothers had spent years building a transportation business in Massachusetts and hoped their brother would join them and finally achieve the stability he had long struggled to find in Haiti. They described Damas as an “ordinary man” who was street smart and “all business.” He was devoted to his children, family, mother and siblings, and worked hard to support his family. He also enjoyed life, and enjoyed having a beer on his days off when gathering with friends and family.

How did Emmanuel Damas end up in ICE custody? Emmanuel Damas came to the U.S. in February 2024 through a program created to help Haitians fleeing violence and instability back in their home. “The program was for two years,” said his brother, Presly Nelson. Nelson said they were seeking asylum for him, which was denied -- therefore the family initiated an appeals process.

On September 14, 2025, at a small family gathering in Dorchester, events were set tragically in motion. According to the family’s account, the group had broken up early and worried neighbors had called police for a safety check on a family member from the home. Police arrived and the situation seemed to be resolved, say family members, but a misunderstanding led to a sudden escalation and officers arrested Emmanuel Damas on an alleged domestic assault charge. Presly said that the family went to Nashua Street Jail and posted bail for Damas, but he never came out. He was picked up by ICE, and ICE shuffled him from Boston to Buffalo and then to Arizona.

How did Emmanuel Damas die under ICE custody? While in detention, Emmanuel Damas developed a toothache and he went to the nurse for medical assistance,” said Presly Nelson, Damas’ brother. “They kept giving him ibuprofen, ibuprofen, ibuprofen and then it got infected.” The infection spread from his mouth to his neck and his chest and lungs. Then his body went into sepsis shock.

What happened after Emmanuel Damas’ death? U.S. Senators Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren, along with U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley, have been working with the family to get details on the case. “Mr. Damas’s death was a terrible, preventable tragedy,” Sen. Markey said in a statement to The Reporter. “It is critical that immigrants in ICE’s custody receive timely and proper medical care. I demanded answers about Mr. Damas’s treatment in custody, and I have yet to hear back from ICE.”

Sources:

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2026/03/18/emmanuel-damas-ice-custody-death-toothache-family-answers>