

19. SANTOS EDILBERTO BANE GAS REYES.

Who was Santos Reyes? Santos Banegas Reyes was a 42-year-old Honduran citizen. He had lived in Mount Sterling, Kentucky for more than a decade, working in roofing, mowing, and tobacco farms. He was a member of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, a national organization working to improve the daily lives of day laborers and migrants. His sister-in-law, Brandee Contreras Rivera, described him as “a good-hearted person who would give you the shirt off his back.” His attorney, Oscar Michelen, stated that he worked consistently as a day laborer, was not known to get hurt on the job, and consistently was able to send money for the care of his two daughters. Santos Reyes had a daughter named Juana, age 10, living in Lexington KY, and another daughter in Honduras for whom he was also sending money to support.

How did Santos Banegas Reyes end up in ICE custody? Santos Reyes was detained by ICE in front of a store in Hempstead, New York on September 17, 2025. After being detained, Santos Reyes was cleared in his initial medical screening, but he died in his cell after only 18 hours in ICE custody. Reyes was found unresponsive in his cell in the Nassau County Correctional Center in East Meadow, NY, on Thursday morning September 18th, police said. His body was taken to the county's medical examiner's office. According to ICE's statement, Reyes' preliminary cause of death appears to be liver failure complicated by alcoholism. “If that's the case, then why did they miss his severe chronic liver failure that caused him to die overnight?”, his lawyer Oscar Michelen asked.

How did Santos Banegas Reyes die under ICE custody? ICE has claimed that Santos's death was the result of liver failure caused by alcoholism. However, his family is challenging that narrative. Santos's family acknowledges that he struggled with drinking and had previously been deported for a DUI, but they also insist that he had no known health conditions that would have caused such a sudden death. They also question why he was cleared for detention in his medical intake exam if he was so sick. Santos' family pushed back on ICE's findings of the cause of death and claimed relatives were only notified that he died by a “source” and not by federal authorities. “It's a remarkable coincidence, isn't it,” said a relative. “The very same day that he gets snatched away by ICE, a seemingly healthy man just so happens to succumb to chronic liver failure.”

What happened after Santos Banegas Reyes' death? After his death, his daughter Juana and her family started fundraising, making baskets and candles to hold a funeral service in Lexington before he can be laid to rest in Honduras. Per protocol, the New York State Attorney General's Office and the Nassau County Sheriff's Department on Long Island have said they will investigate his death.

According to the New York Post, in a partnership with federal officials, Nassau County has designated 50 cells at the jail for ICE detainees; the feds were slated to reimburse the county \$195 per detainee, per night.

Sources:

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