



TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES & TEXAS STATE SENATE

January 27, 2025

Secretary Kristi Noem
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Noem,

We, the undersigned Texas state legislators, write to express our grave concern over the continued unlawful confinement of Leqaa Kordia at the Prairieland Detention Center in Alvarado, TX. Leqaa is a long-time US resident from New Jersey targeted for her constitutionally protected political speech and confined at the Texas civil immigration jail for nearly ten months, despite two immigration court orders to release her on bond. We demand her immediate release from Department of Homeland Security (DHS) custody.

Background

Before her arrest, Leqaa lived among family, including her mother, a U.S. citizen, in Paterson, NJ, worked multiple jobs to support her family, and helped care for her brother who has autism and her mother, who suffers from several chronic illnesses. In 2016, Leqaa moved to the United States from Ramallah, where she was a fashion design student, on a B-2 visitor visa to reunite with her mother. She then enrolled in English language courses on an F-1 student visa. Later, Kordia was misled to believe that her approved family petition provided legal status in the United States. On this mistaken assumption, she reluctantly withdrew from school only to later discover that her green card had still not been approved¹

¹ Jake Offenhartz, *NYPD Shared a Palestinian Protester's Info with ICE. Now It's Evidence in her Deportation Case*, A.P. (May 2, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/nypd-ice-leqaa-kordia-trump-palestinian-protests-90c6f446f431e8cec23a93172e1eb0b8>

During a week of invasive surveillance by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) that included questioning of her family and community members in Paterson, NJ, Leqaa was informed that there was an alleged issue with her immigration status.² Leqaa, who was in the middle of a lawful immigration process, had assumed there must have been some small, resolvable issue with her application. On March 13, 2025, Leqaa voluntarily attended a meeting requested by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Newark, NJ. Upon arrival, however, she was unjustly detained and flown 1,545 miles away to the Prairieland Detention Center near Dallas, Texas, where she has been confined since.³

Arrest and Captivity

In April 2024, Leqaa attended a protest outside the gates of Columbia University, calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.⁴⁴ As the police ordered the crowd to disperse, she was arrested, handcuffed and forced to remove her hijab while being searched. The NYPD released her the next day, and all charges were dismissed.⁵ A year later, under the current administration, the dismissed arrest put Leqaa on DHS's radar.

Conditions of Confinement

Leqaa was arrested during Ramadan, an important month of fasting and prayer for Muslims, yet few religious accommodations have been provided for her during her confinement. She has been denied access to halal food, prayer accommodations and has lost significant weight despite the detention center accommodating religious dietary restrictions for other people in custody at the facility.⁶ In addition, Leqaa reports that ICE has refused to provide prayer mats to Muslim

women who have more recently been locked up at Prairieland, forcing them to take turns using Leqaa's mat. She and her fellow women detainees also face inadequate medical care, unregulated temperatures, inadequate and inedible food, lack of halal meals and overcrowding, with women often having to sleep on the floor, including in the sally port entry/exit area.

An immigration judge has thoroughly reviewed the evidence in Leqaa's case – not once but twice

² Aida Alami, *The Last Columbia Protester in ICE Detention*, New Yorker (Oct. 17, 2025), <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-lede/the-last-columbia-protester-in-ice-detention>

³ *Id.*

⁴ Dep't of Homeland Sec., *VIDEO: Columbia University Student Whose Visa Was Revoked for Supporting Hamas and Terrorist Activities Used CBP Home App to Self-Deport* (Mar. 14, 2025), <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/03/14/video-columbia-university-student-whose-visa-was-revoked-supporting-hamas-and>

⁵ Jake Offenhartz & Adam Geller, *The Only Protester Still Locked Up After Trump's Campus Crackdown Breaks Silence: 'I feel helpless'*, A.P. (Oct. 3, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/leqaa-kordia-trump-palestinian-protests-campus-crackdown-ed4bf05659d889a2a9a36e7181786971>

⁶ Gwynne Hogan, *Criminal-Probe Pretext for NYPD ICE Cooperation Alarms Immigrant Advocates*, The City (May 7, 2025), <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/05/07/leqaa-kordia-jessica-tisch-homeland-security-investigations/>

– and each time concluded that Leqaa is not a danger and should be released on bond.⁷⁷ Leqaa has been granted release on a \$20,000 bond twice.⁸ **DHS themselves conceded that Leqaa is not a danger to the community;** despite their admission, DHS have sought and gotten multiple administrative stays of the immigration judge’s release orders, including automatic stays that are unilateral and process-less.⁹ Federal Magistrate Judge Rutherford found the use of the automatic stay to keep Leqaa confined likely unconstitutional.¹⁰¹⁰

Release Leqaa Kordia

The federal administration’s ongoing and shameful confinement of Leqaa is part of its broader crackdown on freedom of expression and its criminalization of peaceful protest, undermining the protections of the U.S. Constitution to advance their own authoritarian political agenda. This cannot continue. Over the past year, individuals such as Mahmoud Khalil, Rümeysa Öztürk, Badar Khan Suri, and Mohsen Mahdawi have also spoken out in support of Palestine, also faced retaliatory immigration confinement, and have since been rightfully released. Leqaa Kordia also deserves her freedom, and a chance to reunite with her family.

As Texas leaders, we condemn the confinement of Leqaa Kordia in the Prairieland Detention Facility in Alvarado, Texas, and demand her immediate release.

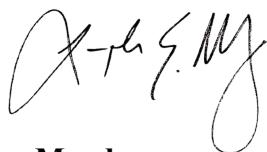
Sincerely,



Salman Bhojani
Texas State Representative
House District 92



Gene Wu
Texas State Representative
House District 137



Joe Moody
Speaker Pro Tempore
House District 78



Molly Cook
Texas State Senator
Senate District 15

⁷ Petitioner’s Motion for Temporary Restraining Order, *Kordia v. Noem*, 3:25-cv-01072, ECF No. 73 (N.D. Tex. Aug. 29, 2025), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C8AUMKJESIkVRLjjqtveq3Qw9BmapAV/view>

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendation, *Kordia v. Noem*, No. 3:25-cv-01072, ECF No. 53 (N.D. Tex. June 27, 2025), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YNqVm5x1aRY3kuE0rPvQM_WGq1DLh8Vl/view



Nathan Johnson
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House District 101



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House District 115



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