



Fact Sheet: Electronic Monitoring Devices as Alternatives to Detention

Alternatives to detention (ATDs) gained increasing attention after the practice of separating immigrant families at the border came to the public's attention in 2018. With renewed attention on the [Flores Settlement Agreement](#), which prevents the government from holding detained families with young children indefinitely, ATD programs have emerged as a [common-sense alternative to family detention](#) as federal authorities look for solutions to manage the influx of immigrants from Central America. ATDs and analogous programs in the criminal justice system have the [support of a significant cross-section](#) of [immigration](#), [criminal justice](#), and [civil rights](#) organizations who believe they are cheap, effective, and humane.

Electronic monitoring devices, or ankle monitors, are increasingly being used as ATDs since Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials have found them to be both economical and effective. Motivated by cost savings, their use is appropriate for immigrants who are neither a flight or safety risk, freeing up detention space for others, including those subject to mandatory detention. Less restrictive and more humane than immigration detention, ankle monitors ensure that individuals waiting for immigration court proceedings are subject to supervision by immigration authorities.

Benefits of ATDs, including electronic monitoring

Electronic monitoring is a common ATD. ICE relies on a [number of different approaches to ATDs](#), including electronic monitoring, case management, parole/bond, and check-ins. The use of electronic monitoring, specifically ankle monitors, has become increasingly prevalent. In July 2018, over 38,000 immigrants were fitted with ankle monitors, representing [45 percent of all individuals of the 84,500 individuals](#) in Intensive Supervision of Appearance Program (ISAP), ICE's primary ATD program.

ATDs are more cost-effective than detention. ICE spends an average of [more than \\$200 each day](#) to detain someone in immigration detention, and, when detaining families, spends even more, [as much as \\$319 per person per day](#). In contrast, low-cost ATD programs like community supervision or electronic monitoring programs can cost as little as \$4.50 per day. In 2018, Congress funded ATDs at [\\$180 million](#), an increase of \$66 million from 2017, demonstrating its interest in funding these programs.

ATDs are effective at ensuring immigrants show up to immigration court. ATDs have proven to be highly effective in ensuring immigration court attendance, with [many programs exceeding 90 percent success rates](#). Significantly cheaper than detention, while ensuring [high rates](#) of compliance, ICE has increasingly relied on ATDs over the past decade, with the number of ATD slots [more than quadrupling](#) between FY 2012 and FY 2017. While the increase in ATDs [without a corresponding reduction in immigration detention](#) minimizes these positive impacts of ATDs, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has recently [endorsed ATDs](#), touting its high success rates and "strong alien cooperation."

Concerns about electronic monitoring

Ankle monitors have negative impacts on those wearing them. While less restrictive than remaining in immigration detention, electronic monitoring imposes significant restraints on wearers' freedom of motion. Ankle monitors are equipped with [GPS capabilities](#) that [monitor](#) an individual's location and movement in real time. They use radio frequency signals to send alerts to a [monitoring station](#) if the device is tinkered with or removed, or if the individual leaves the designated area of travel. The devices hold a charge for about [six hours or less](#), and must be charged for [hours](#) twice every day by a power cord while the device is still attached to the body, requiring the wearer to remain close to an electrical outlet or other power source. The devices can also broadcast pre-programmed audio messages, such as an alert that the device must be charged, causing alarm to the individual wearing the device.

While some argue that immigrants might be able to cut off their ankle monitors or flee entirely, few have done so. Only five percent of those in ICE's leading ATD program in FY 2012 [absconded](#), a much smaller number than those who ultimately received asylum or were ultimately deported.

Ankle monitors can cause pain and other physical impacts. Wearers of ankle monitors exhibit a number of negative effects. Ankle monitors have been reported to cause inflammation, severe cramps, bleeding, sores, and numbness around the foot and leg, as well as damaging [psychological effects](#). In 2016, one woman filed a [complaint](#) with the DHS Office of the Inspector General after experiencing electric shocks, bruising, skin eruptions, hair loss, headaches, chest pain, and difficulty breathing after being fitted with an ankle monitor.

Electronic monitoring is tied to significant social stigma. Individuals wearing ankle monitors have expressed feelings of being [imprisoned](#), and recent immigrants from Central American countries refer to the monitors as "grillettes," which means "[shackles](#)" in Spanish. One woman [describes](#) the shame she experienced while wearing the monitor: "When you go out into the street, the whole world stops to look at your feet. . . . My son asked me why they put this on me, he said that they only do this to thieves. I explained to him that I am not a thief."

The stigma of wearing an ankle monitor limits the employment opportunities of immigrants, including those with work authorization. Immigrants face difficulty in being hired and remaining employed while wearing an ankle monitor. The identification of ankle monitors with criminality makes electronically-monitored employees less appealing to employers, even when the perspective employee has no criminal record and is authorized to work while his or her case is pending. In addition, ICE rules related to electronic monitoring programs place burdens on perspective workers, including unannounced home visits, nightly curfews, and geographical limits, all of which significantly hinder immigrants' ability to maintain a [steady job](#). For example, one asylum seeker who worked at a construction site was fired after a pre-programmed message on his ankle monitor went off in front of [his boss](#).

Ankle monitors raise privacy concerns. There is also concern about the privacy impacts of ankle bracelets, as little information has been made available on how ICE uses the [data it collects](#) on immigrants in the electronic monitoring program, which other entities have access to the data, and how long it is stored by the government.