



million

ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

story

NEWS PRIMER

EPISODE 7

Undocumented Immigrants are Tethered to ICE, and Private Companies, by Ankle Monitors

A PODCAST BY

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**PEABODY
NOMINEE**



Hello!

In Episode 7 of 70 Million, reporter Ryan Katz shares the story of Floricel Liborio Ramos and her family. A refugee from a violence-torn rural province of Mexico, Floricel has lived and worked in California for 20 years without legal citizenship.

In March 2018, Floricel was detained outside a restaurant by Immigration and Customs Enforcement Officers. That was the beginning of her still-unfolding odyssey through the web of criminal justice systems that have upended her and her children's lives in recent months.

Unlike thousands of other undocumented Hispanic immigrants who are currently being detained in facilities across the southwestern U.S. by the U.S. government, Floricel is grappling with another kind of enforced physical restraint: an electronic ankle bracelet that allows law enforcement and court officers to monitor her movements and locations.

As grassroots jail and prison reform activists, and some government and criminal justice agencies nationwide, explore humane solutions to mass

incarceration in local communities, thousands of people are also subjected to ankle monitors, enduring a distinctly inhumane form of incarceration that defies easy solutions.

Local, regional and national initiatives are emerging to more closely examine the implementation of ankle monitors on undocumented residents and U.S. citizens facing sentencing for low-level charges. Here's a look at the evolving use of ankle monitors, as well as nascent activism efforts addressing them.

CURRENT USE OF ANKLE MONITORS

In the United States

All 50 U.S. states, along with the District of Columbia,

use electronic tracking devices, including ankle monitors on pre-trial defendants.

By one estimate, there were 90,000 GPS enabled devices in use in 2009.

According to data from Pew Trusts, the number of accused and convicted criminal offenders monitored with electronic tracking devices increased 140 percent between 2005 and 2015, from approximately 53,000 to more than 125,000.

[The 2016 Pew Trusts](#) report on ankle monitors concluded in part that additional study by law enforcement or public agencies was needed:

“Despite the overall expansion of electronic tracking, however, the technology remains relatively rare in U.S. corrections, and additional growth should be guided by rigorous research.”



“I left detention, but I’m practically still imprisoned in my own home. I realized that sometimes I feel like a robot. Without the battery, I can’t walk. I have to charge it until the light turns green.”

Floricel Liborio Ramos. Credit: Ryan Katz.

GROWING ACTIVISM

Efficacy of Ankle Monitors is Uncertain

A growing body of research and concern among policymakers

is spurring activism around the human and financial aspects of ankle monitors; private companies reap profit off the use of ankle monitors, while their efficacy is unclear for local and federal criminal justice systems.

For defendants, including an increasing number of undocumented immigrants like Floricel, the ankle monitors relegate them to an uncertain future marked by escalating fees for the devices, limited mobility, and shifting rules.

“People on the monitor not only must live with round-the-clock surveillance; most also must pay for the privilege. Fees range from \$5 to \$25 a day, in some cases making a person’s monitor fees more than their monthly rent.”

James Kilgore, Emmett Sanders, [Wired, August 4, 2018.](#)



A poster advocating for Floricel's release.

ANKLE MONITORS AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE Including Immigration Agencies

The increasing use of ankle monitors by federal immigration

agencies, notably the federal government's lead immigration bureaus (Customs and Border Protection, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE), [is raising alarms](#) among activists in jail reform organizations and immigrants rights groups.

Currently, thousands of undocumented immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua and other Central and Latin American countries are being "detained" by law enforcement agencies using electronic monitors in circumstances similar to those experienced by Floricel.

A [2017 Brookings Institution report](#) on ankle monitors and electronic monitors by technology and governance experts argued that the devices have high "failure rates," yet ICE and local jurisdictions continue to use them: "Despite the high stakes and widespread technical failings of electronic monitoring, there are no compulsory national standards for monitoring systems," says the report.



"In many respects, the technology has moved faster than the policy and practice. The data points from electronic monitoring can result in numerous false alerts that are difficult for officers to respond to."

Carl Wicklund, former executive director, American Probation and Parole Association, in ["Examining Electronic Monitoring Technologies,"](#) Pew Charitable Trusts, 2015.

Above: The monitor burns Floricel's ankle.

MULTIMEDIA REPORTS

In the News About Ankle Monitors

The use of ankle monitors has increased in local jurisdictions.

Watch a [video report by KNXV](#) News Channel 15 in Phoenix, AZ, which outlines a major increase in use of ankle monitors by courts and law enforcement officials in Maricopa County, AZ, a jurisdiction struggling to address the rising costs from its sprawling jail system, and the volatile electoral politics of immigration.

Nearby Pima County, an Arizona jurisdiction facing similar challenges, was featured in an earlier [70 Million Podcast episode](#).



MULTIMEDIA REPORTS

In the News About Ankle Monitors

In 2015, The Marshall Project

published an [informative first-person story](#) by a teenaged defendant outfitted with an ankle monitor. Additionally, the Marshall Project offers a [round-up of more analysis](#) and reporting on ankle monitors that we highly recommend.



From the moment they took us out of immigration, they put a tracker on each one of us.

Watch this August 2018 [video report from the Texas Tribune](#) about what life is like for an immigrant to wear an ankle monitor.

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