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Imperial immigration facility gets more judges



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Two immigration judges are heading to the immigration detention facility in Imperial County.

Edward Barcus and Paul Habich are part of a group of 14 new immigration judges announced Monday by the Executive Office for Immigration Review, a branch of the Department of Justice that employs immigration judges. The judges were appointed by former Attorney General Loretta Lynch to begin hearing cases in April.

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The new additions bring the total number of immigration judges to 312, according to the office, which is authorized to have up to 374 judges.

Barcus was previously a district court judge in Oklahoma, and Habich worked as an attorney for Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

There were no judges working in the Imperial detention facility, according to the [agency](#), though it had announced in March that it was planning to temporarily reassign judges to the Imperial facility, among others. Judges at the immigration court in downtown San Diego heard cases from detainees at Imperial via video conference. In one of his January [executive orders](#), President Donald Trump called for more immigration judges to work in detention facility courtrooms to speed up proceedings.

The immigration court system has had a growing backlog for years.

Nationwide, immigration courts had a backlog of 518,545 cases at the end of September 2016, according to a [report](#) posted this month by the Executive Office for Immigration Review. Just over 3,500 of those cases are for the Imperial court, and another 3,750 are for the San Diego court. The San Diego court has six judges [assigned](#) to it.

The other detention facility in the San Diego area, the Otay Mesa Detention Center, has two judges assigned.

Though it is a couple of hours away, some people detained at the San Ysidro port of entry, including asylum seekers, end up at the Imperial Regional Detention Facility, which holds on average about 700 people daily, according to information from the facility.

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