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## Immigration rights groups accuse officials of racial profiling

By Brian Bennett

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WASHINGTON – Immigrant rights groups filed a raft of legal actions on Tuesday alleging abuse and racial profiling by Customs and Border Protection officers in five states.

Three lawsuits alleging illegal treatment by border patrol officers were filed in federal court in Washington, Texas and New York. Six separate legal complaints were also filed with CBP in those states as well as Ohio and Florida, seeking cash damages for immigrants who described harsh and sometimes violent conditions in confinement.

In affidavits and complaints, U.S. citizens and immigrants describe Customs officers putting detainees in cold, cramped conditions for several days with little food and water. They alleged that the poor conditions were used to try to compel the immigrants to sign voluntary deportation orders.

The cases also describe U.S. citizens being singled out for questioning by border agents apparently based on their race.

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“We hope these cases bring attention to the systemic actions on the part of border patrol agents,” said Betsy Ginsberg, a professor at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law.

Ginsberg helped file a complaint against CBP in New York on behalf of a 63-year-old woman named Elizabeth Takem-aishetu who is seeking \$600,000 in damages from CBP after she suffered a stroke while detained at the Sandusky Bay Processing Center in Sandusky, Ohio.

Takem-aishetu was returning home to New York state from a funeral in Minnesota when a border patrol agent boarded the bus she was on and picked her out for questioning. Takem-aishetu had been living in New York for eight years, after she overstayed a visitor’s visa.

While she was detained, Takem-aishetu was shackled to a bench and denied access to the bathroom for several hours. Doctors have determined that her stroke was brought on by the stress of her detention, according to her complaint. The stroke has left her partially paralyzed and numb on the left side of her body. She was later determined to be a low priority for deportation, and her case was closed.

“These cases exemplify the culture of impunity that has taken hold at CBP,” said Melissa Crow, the director of the legal action center at the American Immigration Council, a think tank based in Washington, D.C. that helped coordinate the cases.

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