

ICE target was already in prison when agents detained St. Paul man in his underwear, DOC says

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A man targeted by federal immigration enforcement agents earlier this week, leading to the detainment of a U.S. citizen in his underwear amid frigid Minnesota conditions, was already in prison, the Minnesota Department of Corrections says.

On Sunday, ChongLy Scott Thao says ICE burst into his home without a warrant and detained him at gunpoint. Videos shared on social media showed agents bringing him out in the cold wearing a blanket and his underwear.

The 56-year-old said that ICE drove him to the "middle of nowhere" before finally reviewing his identification. They then brought him home.

The family of the man taken from the home says it was a case of mistaken identity. Following the incident, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said, "The U.S. citizen lives with these two convicted sex offenders at the site of the operation. The individual refused to be fingerprinted or facially ID'd. He matched the description of the targets."

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency says they were looking for two men accused of sex crimes, one of which was Lue Moua. The DHS earlier told the public Moua was at large. However, the Minnesota Department of Corrections says that Moua has been in prison since 2024 on a kidnapping charge.

According to DOC records, Moua is currently scheduled for release in January 2027, and has an active ICE detainer. Officials with the state's corrections department say that ICE should have known that Moua was being held.

For their part, DHS officials sought to blame the apparent confusion on the actions of Minnesota officials.

"We need state and local law enforcement engagement and information so we don't have to have such a presence on the streets," the department said in a tweet. "We are calling on Governor Walz and Mayor Frey to agree to turning this child predator over to ICE, so this criminal can never prey on innocent American children."

The state corrections department has said repeatedly over recent weeks that it is cooperating with federal immigration enforcement agencies, and accused DHS of inflating the number of arrest retainers. On Thursday, Vice President JD Vance while visiting the state appeared to acknowledge that the Minnesota Department of Corrections has been cooperating with ICE.

St. Paul Mayor Kaohly Her, who said Thao is a family friend, has accused the DHS of lying when they claimed Thao was living with the two suspects.

Thao told The Associated Press that he's planning to file a civil rights lawsuit against DHS.

Nicole Sganga contributed to this report.

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