

Minnesota corrections officials again dispute ICE numbers on criminals

Federal authorities say they have more than 1,360 detainees for ‘criminal illegal aliens’ in custody. State officials called those numbers grossly inflated



By Frederick Melo | Pioneer Press

PUBLISHED: January 21, 2026 at 6:24 PM CST | UPDATED: January 21, 2026 at 7:02 PM CST

How many detainees apprehended by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Minnesota are non-citizens being held on warrants for violent crimes, and how many are U.S. citizens, Green Card holders and others with no criminal record?

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security claims that ICE has more than 1,360 arrest detainees for “criminal illegal aliens” in their custody, or wanted individuals released by state prisons into the community instead of into federal control.

“They are not random and they are not political,” said Greg Bovino, U.S. Border Patrol head, during a Tuesday press conference about the detentions. “They are about removing criminals who are actively harming Minneapolis neighborhoods.”

State officials push back on ICE claims

However, officials with the Minnesota Department of Corrections don't agree, calling the numbers grossly inflated — evidence of what they call “operational incompetence” at best or, at worst, “deliberate propaganda designed to inflame public fear rather than inform it.”

In fact, non-citizens in the state prison system measure in the hundreds, not the thousands, according to state officials, who have repeatedly called federal tallies incorrect.

The state Department of Corrections issued a lengthy and strongly-worded written statement Wednesday pushing back on multiple DHS claims that it says conflate state prison operations with those of county jails and federal enforcement activity, reflecting “a fundamental misunderstanding of Minnesota’s correctional system.”

“DHS claims that ‘ICE has more than 1,360 arrest detainees for the criminal illegal aliens in their custody,’ yet has provided no methodology, jurisdictional breakdown, or time frame explaining how they arrived at this number,” reads the statement.

Violent offenders

The Department of Corrections took a closer look at 37 individuals highlighted in news releases issued by DHS over the past month. In each written release, DHS claimed the violent offender was now in custody as a result of the federal crackdown that began around Jan. 4, no thanks to the state.

In reality, according to the Department of Corrections, most of those individuals were never in the custody of the state prison system, though some were in fact transferred from a state prison to ICE, as requested through an immigration detainer.

DHS “has not identified a single instance where DOC released someone in violation of an ICE detainer,” reads the statement from the Department of Corrections. “DHS’s ‘Worst of the Worst’ lists include numerous individuals with no Minnesota prison custody and, in many cases, no Minnesota criminal record.”

Some entries, in fact, appear to be cases of mistaken identity, reflecting similar names that do not match mugshots and other identifiers provided by DHS.

While individual county sheriffs and county jails may operate under separate arrangements with ICE, state law requires the Department of Corrections to notify ICE when a person committed to the state prison system is not a U.S. citizen.

As a result, according to the department, “DOC also honors all ICE detainers and coordinates transfers when ICE requests pickup. ICE alone determines whether to place a detainer and is responsible for arranging custody transfer.”

In some cases, ICE released the individual back into the community, according to the state.

The Department of Corrections called on DHS to explain its data sources and clean up its “Worst of the Worst” lists to “accurately reflect verifiable Minnesota criminal histories and DOC custody status.”

Both federal immigration officials and the state Department of Corrections plan on holding press conferences Thursday where the issue is likely to be revisited.

[Link to Original Story](#)