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US citizen says ICE took him at gunpoint in only underwear despite frigid cold and no warrant

1 of 6 | Federal immigration agents have detained a U.S. citizen in Minnesota at gunpoint without a warrant. That's according to ChongLy "Scott" Thao, who says agents forced open his door, entered with guns drawn and led him outside in his underwear in freezing conditions.



BY **JACK BROOK**

Updated 2:13 PM EST, January 20, 2026

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ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Federal immigration agents bashed open a door and detained a U.S. citizen in his Minnesota home at gunpoint without a warrant, then led him out onto the streets in his underwear in

subfreezing conditions, according to his family and videos reviewed by The Associated Press.

ChongLy “Scott” Thao told the AP that his daughter-in-law alerted him on Sunday afternoon that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were banging at the door of his residence in St. Paul. He told her not to open it. Masked agents then forced their way in and pointed guns at the family, yelling at them, Thao recalled.

“I was shaking,” he said. “They didn’t show any warrant; they just broke down the door.”

Amid a massive surge of federal agents into the Twin Cities, immigration authorities are facing backlash from residents and the local leaders for [warrantless arrests](#), [aggressive clashes](#) with protestors and the [fatal shooting of mother of three Renee Good](#).

“ICE is not doing what they say they’re doing,” St. Paul Mayor Kaohly Her, a Hmong American, said in a statement about Thao’s arrest. “They’re not going after hardened criminals. They’re going after anyone and everyone in their path. It is unacceptable and un-American.”

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Encounter is caught on video

Thao, who has been a U.S. citizen for decades, said that as he was being detained he asked his daughter-in-law to find his identification but the agents told him they didn’t want to see it.

Instead, as his 4-year-old grandson watched and cried, Thao was led out in handcuffs wearing only sandals and underwear with just a blanket wrapped around his shoulders.

Videos captured the scene, which included people blowing whistles and horns and neighbors screaming at the more than a dozen gun-toting agents to leave Thao’s family alone.

Thao said agents drove him “to the middle of nowhere” and made him get out of the car in the frigid weather so they could photograph him. He said he feared they would beat him. He was asked for his ID, which agents earlier prevented him from retrieving.

Agents eventually realized that he was a U.S. citizen with no criminal record, Thao said, and an hour or two

later, they brought him back to his house. There they made him show his ID and then left without apologizing for detaining him or breaking his door, Thao said.

Homeland Security defends the operation

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security described the ICE operation at Thao's home as a "targeted operation" seeking two convicted sex offenders.

"The US citizen lives with these two convicted sex offenders at the site of the operation," DHS said. "The individual refused to be fingerprinted or facially ID'd. He matched the description of the targets."

Thao's family said in a statement that it "categorically disputes" the DHS account and "strongly objects to DHS's attempt to publicly justify this conduct with false and misleading claims."

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Thao told the AP that only he, his son and daughter-in-law and his grandson live at the rental home. Neither they nor the property's owner are listed in the Minnesota sex offender registry. The nearest sex offender listed as living in the zip code is more than two blocks away.

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DHS later released the names and photos of two people it described as "violent illegal alien sexual offenders" that it was seeking to detain in St. Paul. Thao said he had never seen these men before and they did not live with him.

DHS did not respond to an earlier request from The Associated Press asking why the agency believed they were present in Thao's home.

Thao's son, Chris Thao, said ICE agents stopped him while he was driving to work before they went to detain his father. He said he was driving a car he borrowed from his cousin's boyfriend, whose first name matches that of one of the men DHS said it was seeking. Chris Thao said he did not know the boyfriend's last name.

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Family fled Laos after helping US

The family said they are particularly upset by ChongLy Thao's treatment at the hands of the U.S. government because his mother had to flee to the U.S. from Laos when communists took over in the 1970s since she had supported American covert operations in the country and her life was in danger.

Thao's adopted mother, Choua Thao, was a nurse who treated CIA-backed Hmong soldiers in the U.S. government's "[Secret War](#)" from 1961 to 1975 against the communists, according to the Hmong Nurses Association website.

Choua Thao, who passed away in late December, "treated countless civilians and American soldiers, working closely with U.S. personnel," her daughter-in-law Louansee Moua wrote on a GoFundMe page for the family.

ChongLy Thao says he's planning to file a civil rights lawsuit against DHS and no longer feels secure to sleep in his home.

"I don't feel safe at all," Thao said. "What did I do wrong? I didn't do anything."

Associated Press writer Michael Biesecker in Washington contributed.

Brook is a corps member for The Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. [Report for America](#) is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on

undercovered issues.

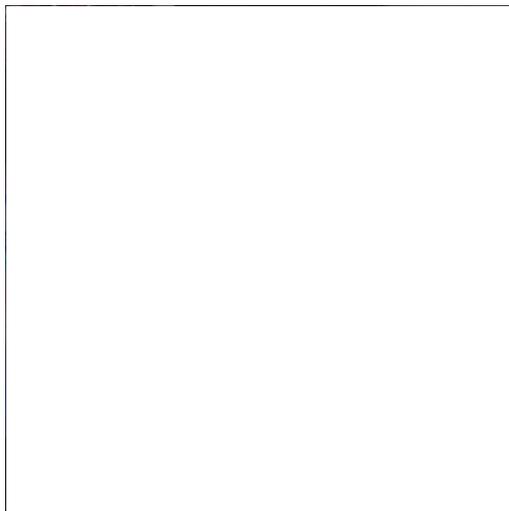


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