

City of Philadelphia



Council of the City of Philadelphia Office of the Chief Clerk Room 402, City Hall Philadelphia

(Resolution No. 250138)

RESOLUTION

Calling on Immigration and Customs Enforcement to immediately release Sereyrath “One” Van from Moshannon Valley Processing Center and calling on Philadelphia’s Members of the United States Congress to champion welcoming immigration policies in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to recognize Philadelphia as a City of second chances, especially for formerly incarcerated non-citizens.

WHEREAS, Sereyrath “One” Van was born in the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in Thailand, as the child of survivors of the genocide in Cambodia led by the Khmer Rouge, who rose to power as a result of the U.S. military’s destabilization of Cambodia during the Vietnam War; and

WHEREAS, Van and his family resettled as refugees with legal permanent residence in Southwest Philadelphia in 1984, when he was just four years old, where he has since become a beloved figure in his community, known by all as “One”; and

WHEREAS, Like far too many of Philadelphia’s youth in under-resourced neighborhoods, Van was ensnared by the school-to-prison pipeline as a teenager. However, he worked tirelessly to transform his life, earning his GED, attending both community college and trade school, and ultimately securing steady employment as a mechanic; and

WHEREAS, Despite his efforts, Van faced persistent barriers to achieving long-term stability, leading to his re-incarceration in 2018 due to a drug conviction. Throughout this time, Van took full responsibility for his past, while using his time in prison to engage in deep self-reflection and study in the law library; and

WHEREAS, Van’s early release in 2023 after serving his minimum sentence reflected his transformation as an individual and newfound desire to advocate for his community, but only after he had received a final order of removal from Immigration and Customs Enforcement; and

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WHEREAS, In 2021 an immigration judge revoked Van’s legal permanent residence in immigration court due to his non-violent drug conviction, which is—among a broader number of violent and non-violent criminal convictions—categorized as an “aggravated felony” under immigration law; and

WHEREAS, Following his initial release from ICE custody in January 2024, Van returned to his community, rededicating himself to his family and career as a mechanic and becoming involved with VietLead, a grassroots organization serving the Southeast Asian refugee community in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Despite having a pending application for a U Visa for victims of certain serious criminal offenses, ICE re-detained Van on August 15, 2024. In under one month, over 1,000 community members and more than 40 community organizations signed the #AllforONE petition calling for his immediate release; and

WHEREAS, Although Van’s immigration case was reopened in September 2024, Immigration Customs Enforcement has refused to release Van since his re-detention. On February 12th, 2025, an immigration judge upheld the finding of his nonviolent conviction as a deportable offense, denying Van any form of relief from deportation with little consideration of his 40-year residence in the United States, deep family ties in the United States, and demonstrated personal transformation as a returning citizen; and

WHEREAS, The ongoing detention of Van, along with the looming threat of his deportation, occurs against the backdrop of the growing unjust criminalization of immigrants and refugees across the United States, such as the passage of the 2025 Laken Riley Act, which violates U.S. residents’ right to due process and subjects them to mandatory ICE detention based on merely an arrest for certain non-violent crimes; and

WHEREAS, ICE continues to target immigrant and refugee Philadelphians living under ICE supervision with final orders of removal, and such deportations double punish immigrants and refugees for criminal convictions who have already served their time for their mistakes and many of whom are long-term U.S. residents or even refugees from war; and

WHEREAS, The deportation crisis immigrants face today stems from draconian “tough-on-crime” federal policies, more notably the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which intertwined the federal immigration and both state and federal criminal justice systems into a system of “crimmigration” by requiring mandatory detention and deportation proceedings of any non-U.S. citizen convicted of a broad category of criminal convictions, regardless of the length of their residence in the United States; family and community ties; or how long ago the offense occurred; and

WHEREAS, Because 15.7% of Philadelphians are immigrants, and 77% of immigrant Philadelphians are Black and brown, the city of Philadelphia is susceptible to these harsh

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“crimmigration laws” due to continued disproportionate criminal-legal impact on these communities; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s Members of Congress in the United States Senate and House of Representatives must champion the dignity and safety of formerly incarcerated immigrants and refugees who are an intrinsic part of the entire immigrant population in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This immigrant population is a primary driver of the state’s population growth and represents a spending power of \$30.1 billion and paid \$11.5 billion in taxes in 2021; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, That we hereby call on Immigration and Customs Enforcement to immediately release refugee and Philadelphian Sereyrath “One” Van from Moshannon Valley Processing Center, and also call on Philadelphia’s Members of the United States Congress to champion welcoming immigration policies in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and recognize Philadelphia as a City of second chances, especially for formerly incarcerated non-citizens.

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CERTIFICATION: This is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution, Adopted by the Council of the City of Philadelphia on the twenty seventh day of February, 2025.

Kenyatta Johnson
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Elizabeth McCollum
CHIEF CLERK OF THE COUNCIL

Introduced by: Councilmember O'Rourke

Sponsored by: Councilmembers O'Rourke, Gauthier, Landau and Brooks