



# PARDON

## Chanthon Bun

Co-Executive Director at Asian Prisoner Support Committee

---



Mr. Bun currently is in danger of deportation to Cambodia, a country that he does not remember. Mr. Bun was born in Cambodia during the Khmer Rouge genocide. He faced starvation, violence, and witnessed atrocities that no child should ever have to witness. He escaped Cambodia with his family across the border into Thailand where he spent years in a crowded refugee camp. Eventually, they were resettled in California as refugees when he was a six-year-old child.

Growing up in Los Angeles, Mr. Bun was surrounded by poverty, violence, and trauma from the genocide. No resources were provided to him or his family to deal with the trauma or to adjust to life in the United States. At school and in the neighborhood, Mr. Bun and other refugee youth faced relentless bullying and racism. Mr. Bun and young boys of the same age turned to gangs for a sense of safety and acceptance.

In 1998, just after turning 18, Mr. Bun took part in a robbery of a business and was arrested shortly afterwards. California as well as the rest of the country was at the peak of mass incarceration and harsh sentencing. A judge sentenced Mr. Bun to 49 years in prison.

While incarcerated, Mr. Bun took on leadership roles in numerous volunteer programs such as San Quentin's SQUIRES, which mentors at-risk youth, facilitated classes to help incarcerated men process trauma through programs like Restoring Out Original True Selves (ROOTS), California Reentry Institute (CRI) Guiding Rage into Power (GRIP), and Kid C.A.T., a group advocating for youth sentenced to prison. Mr. Bun was a teacher assistant for Machine Shop and Electronics helping younger incarcerated people obtain a career.

Mr. Bun also became a passionate advocate against mass incarceration. Working with Asian Prisoner Support Committee (APSC), Mr. Bun led a project to send a newsletter to Asian and Pacific Islander (API) incarcerated people in parts of the country where there were few other incarcerated API people to let them know that they were not alone. Working to shift narratives, Mr. Bun worked as a producer with KALW, a public radio station, on *Uncuffed*, an award winning podcast telling the stories of incarcerated people.

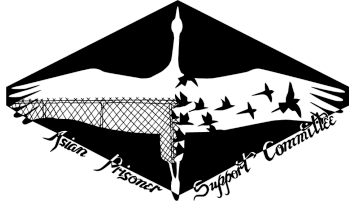
After 23 years in prison, the parole board found that Mr. Bun should be granted parole. While waiting for review from Governor Newsom, Mr. Bun was infected with COVID-19 while in San Quentin State Prison during one of the largest outbreaks in the country. Community organizations called on Governor Newsom to release Mr. Bun and not turn him over to ICE on his release date.

On July 1, 2020, Mr. Bun left San Quentin State Prison as a free person. Although still seriously ill with COVID, Mr. Bun began speaking out to press and elected officials on what he had witnessed during the outbreak. He began organizing memorials and fundraisers for loved ones lost in prison due to COVID. He continues to help run "Mourning Our Losses", a project to remember the lives lost to COVID in prison.

After recovering, Mr. Bun joined Asian Law Caucus as a Yuri Kochiyama Fellow, a year long fellowship for formerly incarcerated immigrants and refugees to take part in organizing and advocacy. Mr. Bun has testified before the California Senate and elected officials on incarceration, immigration, and COVID-19 in prisons. He regularly speaks with the press and community organizations to shed light on the experiences of incarcerated people.

Despite his release and transformative work, Mr. Bun remains at risk of arrest by ICE and deportation. A pardon from Governor Newsom would protect him from deportation and allow him to remain in California, the only home he has known.

*Learn more about the Asian Prisoner Support Committee 4 (APSC4) who are facing deportation at <https://www.asianprisonersupport.com/apsc-4>*



# PARDON

## Borey “Peejay” Ai

Senior Community Advocate at Asian Prisoner Support Committee



Borey Ai (“Peejay”) was born in a refugee camp in Thailand where his family fled to escape the Khmer Rouge genocide in Cambodia. Peejay and his family came to the U.S. as refugees when he was only 4-years-old. Shortly thereafter, Peejay became a lawful permanent resident. Growing up in a poor neighborhood in Stockton, Peejay spent his childhood surrounded by poverty and violence. In the first grade, he survived a mass shooting at Cleveland Elementary School, now known as the “Cleveland School Massacre,” during which a gunman opened fire with an assault rifle on 300 first through third graders during their recess period. All of the fatally shot children and those who were wounded were Southeast Asian refugees, like Peejay. That day, he witnessed the fatal shooting of his cousin. By the first grade, Peejay had lived through unspeakable tragedies both at the Thai refugee camp where he was born, and in the United States. Consequently, as a young child, he lived in a constant state of fear.

Peejay grew up in the 1980s and ‘90s-- during California’s prison boom, and when the state passed a proliferation of “tough on crime” policies, including the state’s three-strikes law, mandatory minimum sentences, and trying children as adults. With an absent father and a family that lacked the resources to support him through his trauma, at a very young age, Peejay turned to gang involvement for a sense of safety and acceptance. When he was 14 years old, Peejay and three older gang members committed an armed robbery at a liquor store. The store owner grabbed Peejay’s gun, which discharged, killing the store owner. Peejay surrendered himself to the police and was tried as an adult, becoming one of California’s youngest persons to be sentenced to life in prison.

While in state prison, Peejay chose a path of transformation. He obtained his GED, and his Associate’s degree in Liberal Arts. He completed and led numerous programs, including S.Q.U.I.R.E.S. (a youth diversion program), Restoring Our Original True Selves (ROOTS), Guiding Rage Into Power (“GRIP”), and Kid C.A.T. (Creating Awareness Together). Peejay’s leadership roles in groups like Kid C.A.T. resulted in important juvenile justice reforms, including SB 9 (California Fair Sentencing for Youth), and SB 260 and SB 261 (Justice for Juveniles with Adult Sentencing). Peejay is a state certified rape and crisis counselor and a domestic violence counselor. In July 2016, after 20 years in state prison, at his first parole hearing, the California Parole Board acknowledged Peejay’s transformation and granted him parole.

On the day of Peejay’s release, rather than being reunited with his family who he had been separated from since the age of 14, Peejay was transferred directly by CDCR to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility. Peejay spent a year and a half in immigration detention fighting his deportation to a country he never knew. Through a grassroots campaign led by Asian Prisoner Support Committee, ICE released Peejay on May 10, 2018. After his release from ICE custody, Peejay worked at Guiding Rate Into Power (GRIP) as the Project Coordinator, where he provided support for GRIP rehabilitative programs in California state prisons, including conducting and planning orientations, trainings, events, reports, and other administrative work. Peejay also served on the Leadership Team for the Transformative In-Prison Work Group (TPW), a statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that believe in the transformative and healing power of community-based in-prison programs. Currently, Peejay is employed full-time as the Community Advocate for Asian Prisoner Support Committee. He volunteers with youth programs in Oakland, including Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants. Despite his release and transformative work, Peejay remains at risk of deportation, and awaits a pardon from Gov. Newsom.

*Learn more about the Asian Prisoner Support Committee 4 (APSC4) who are facing deportation at <https://www.asianprisonersupport.com/apsc-4>*



# PARDON

## Ngheip “Ke” Lam

Programs and Facilities Manager at APSC

---



Ngheip Lam was born in Hai Phong, Vietnam. At age 2, Ngheip and his parents fled Vietnam by boat with about 50 other people to escape the Vietnamese Communist Party. They were stranded in the South China Sea for 6 months before being rescued by some fishermen. At the age of 4, Ngheip came to the United States with his parents and younger brother as a refugee and resettled in the Bay Area.

Ngheip’s parents separated when he was 6 years old. They moved into government housing in the Potrero Hill District of San Francisco. There was a lot of violence, drug dealing, and poverty. Ngheip became a victim of bullying. Kids would throw rocks at him, spit on him, push him down to the ground and racially mock him. Ngheip turned to his mom for support about the bullying, but only to be told “Be quiet.” Consequently, Ngheip began isolating his emotions and himself in his room. At age 15, Ngheip was jumped into an Asian street gang. He felt a sense of belonging, safe, and understood. The other Asian gang members grew up with similar struggles of bullying, culture discrimination, and racism.

Six days after Ngheip turned 17, he participated in a gang altercation, which led to him taking the life of another youth. Ngheip knew he did something horrible and the next day he turned himself into police custody. Ngheip had no previous criminal justice involvement. The juvenile judge stated he was unfit for juvenile court because of the nature of the crime and Ngheip was tried as an adult. A judge sentenced him to 27 years to life with the possibility of parole.

While in prison, Ngheip turned his life around, addressed his past trauma, and worked to take accountability for the harm he had caused. Despite being a leader in prison and upheld as a model of rehabilitation, Ngheip had little hope of leaving prison. Working with Human Rights Watch from inside San Quentin, Ngheip founded the KidCAT program for youth sentenced to life in prison and advocated for [SB260](#) and [SB261](#) reforming the parole process. In November 2015, Governor Brown found Ngheip posed no threat to public safety and granted him parole after serving over 22 years. The day Ngheip was supposed to be released he was arrested by ICE and faced deportation back to Vietnam. But after 5 months in ICE detention he was released after Vietnam declined to accept him for deportation.

Currently, Ngheip still lives in a limbo state without a clear form of immigration status and does not know when he will be deported. Despite the uncertainty, Ngheip set out to give back to his community. When Ngheip was released in April of 2016, he started volunteering with Asian Prisoner Support Committee’s (APSC) and later joined staff as a reentry navigator using his lived experience to help others break the cycle of incarceration. Since his release, Ngheip has been honored by the San Jose Mayor and Supervisors, Asian Health Services, and Alameda County for his activism and community service. Outside of his full-time job, Ngheip works with Urban Community Garden, repairing and donating hundreds of bicycles to children.

A pardon is Ngheip’s sole avenue to prevent deportation and restore his immigration status. I encourage you to use your clemency power to pardon Ngheip so that he may remain in the United States and continue to serve his community.

*Learn more about the Asian Prisoner Support Committee 4 (APSC4) who are facing deportation at <https://www.asianprisonersupport.com/apsc-4>*



# PARDON

## Maria Legarda

Reentry Navigator at Asian Prisoner Support Committee

---



Maria Legarda, an immigrant and community leader, is currently facing the threat of deportation to the Philippines after 17 years of incarceration.

Maria was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. Growing up, life at home for Maria and her family was filled with emotional and financial challenges. At 10 years old, Maria's sister passed away after a 6-year battle with juvenile rheumatoid arthritis and complications from leukemia. This tragedy caused immense grief and left her parents with insurmountable medical debts. As the eldest of three siblings, Maria felt financially responsible for her family but low wages in the Philippines made it impossible to pay debts and support her family. So, like many Filipinos, Maria made the hard decision to leave the country to seek work at a young age.

In 2001, Maria immigrated alone to the United States on a work visa. As a young woman raised in a family that never talked about emotional and personal struggles, Maria found it difficult to cope with loneliness and life in the U.S. With the immense pressure to make money to help care for her family in the Philippines, Maria turned to drugs to deal with unresolved trauma and personal challenges while living in Los Angeles, California. During this vulnerable time at age 21, she began to talk to a man online for companionship, chatting and texting before agreeing to meet. In their first encounter, he raped Maria and she became pregnant. With no one to confide in and fearing shame if she told her family, she continued to turn to meth to help her escape the trauma of the rape. The more she used drugs, the deeper she fell into addiction. Maria's substance use led to her going into premature labor and losing her child. In 2004, at age 23, Maria was convicted of 1st degree murder and sentenced to 25 years to life.

While in prison, Maria chose a path of personal healing and transformation. She worked hard on herself by seeking therapy, and she participated and later facilitated numerous self-help groups and programs such as Narcotics Anonymous, Survivors of Incest and Rape, Bridges to Life, and Victim Offender Education Group. Maria also served as a panel member for the Beyond Incarceration Program, in which she mentors at-risk youth. She also volunteered her time with the Gifted Hands Crochet Program and Pillowcase Project, crocheting blankets, beanies, and scarves for children's hospitals. In 2019, Governor Brown granted Maria parole, finding that she is not a threat to public safety. On the day Maria was released from state prison, CDCR directly transferred her over to ICE for deportation. Maria sat in an immigration detention center for almost a year during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since her release from detention, Maria has continued to work on her healing and give back to her community. Maria works with the reentry team at APSC helping people successfully return home from incarceration. In particular, Maria is passionate about women's rights and healing the systematic trauma of incarceration. Maria launched the Community and Reentry Empowerment (CARE) Program providing reentry services to women, trans, and non-binary people who are often overlooked from advocacy on incarceration.

Although the threat of deportation still hangs over Maria, she refuses to give in to fear and has continued to build a new life while remaining grounded in a strong network of family, friends, and community members in the Bay Area.

*Learn more about the Asian Prisoner Support Committee 4 (APSC4) who are facing deportation at <https://www.asianprisonersupport.com/apsc-4>*