

WHITE HOUSE PETITIONED ON ICE DETAINEE

We took up a very serious case at Christmastime, hoping to bring relief to a man who has paid his dues and has been through enough. We asked Catholics to appeal to President Donald Trump to release Pornchai Moontri from the custody of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). He deserves to be repatriated to Thailand.

We were encouraged by news that the embassy in Thailand was contacted by ICE just days after we made our request; Pornchai's case showed movement for the first time. Right before Christmas we asked our email subscribers to redouble their efforts making one more push.

Bill Donohue has known of the plight of Pornchai for many years. It was Fr. Gordon J. MacRae—he is another victim of injustice—who brought Pornchai's story to his attention. Pornchai rightly credits Fr. MacRae with mentoring him. More than that, MacRae brought him into the Catholic Church.

We explained why Pornchai deserves to be released.

Pornchai was born in Thailand in 1973 and was abandoned by his mother when he was two-years-old. She intended to sell him, but a young relative came to his rescue and brought him into his home. When he was 11-years-old his mother reemerged with a new husband; they took him to Bangor, Maine, against his will. His stepfather, Richard Bailey, immediately started raping him, and did so for three years. At age 14, Pornchai escaped (it was his second escape) and became homeless. When he was 18, he got into a fight with a much bigger man while he was intoxicated and took the man's life during the struggle (he was so drunk he does not recall stabbing him).

While awaiting trial, Pornchai's mother came to visit him in

jail, warning him that if he disclosed to the authorities what his stepfather did to him, she would suffer the consequences. Fearing for his mother's life, he prudently decided not to speak, even to the point of not defending himself in court. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to 45 years in prison. Maine has no parole.

In 2000, his mother attempted to leave her husband; they were living in Guam. That is where she was beaten to death. The only suspect was her husband, but there was no evidence to convict him. Subsequently, many things changed.

In 2005, Pornchai was sent to a New Hampshire State Prison. That is where he met Fr. MacRae. Five years later, Pornchai became a Catholic; he soon became a fan of the Catholic League.

In 2018, after new evidence emerged—advocates for Pornchai pursued Bailey—and justice was finally done. Bailey was convicted on forty felony counts of child sexual abuse against Pornchai.

On September 11, 2020, Pornchai, after serving his full sentence, was released at age 47 to the custody of ICE for deportation to his native Thailand. He is still in custody, with no end in sight.

Pornchai has served his time and has suffered enough. He should now be set free.