

## Demand That Gov. Newsom Pardon Detained Firefighter & Refugee Bounchan Keola and #StopICETransfers



**Image Description:** Graphite illustration of detained firefighter and refugee Bounchan Keola. To the right reads “Demand Gov. Newsom Pardon Detained Firefighter and Refugee Bounchan Keola” followed by “bit.ly/DefendBoun” and “#DefendBoun #StopICETransfers #FreeThemAll”

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- Toolkit: [bit.ly/DefendBoun](https://bit.ly/DefendBoun)
- Petition: [bit.ly/DefendBounPetition](https://bit.ly/DefendBounPetition)
- [Share UK Guardian Story on Boun](#)

**Boun Keoun** is a Khmu refugee from Laos who served as an incarcerated firefighter. On October 2nd, Boun was seriously injured fighting wildfires. Days later, the California Department of Corrections Rehabilitation (CDCR) called ICE to have him arrested under a policy defended by Governor Newsom. Weeks earlier, Governor Newsom also handed **Kao Saelee**, another refugee and incarcerated firefighter over to ICE and has ignored calls from hundreds of thousands of people to pardon him and halt transfers (toolkit: [bit.ly/FreeSaelee](https://bit.ly/FreeSaelee)).

Kao and Boun are just two of hundreds of Californians turned over to ICE by CDCR during the COVID-19 pandemic. Demand that Gov. Newsom pardon Boun and Kao to prevent their deportation and stop turning Californians over to ICE!

**#DefendBoun #FreeSaelee #StopICETransfers #FreeThemAll**

**Target: Governor Gavin Newsom**

 **Call Script to Gov. Gavin Newsom (916-445-2841)**

“Hi my name is \_\_\_\_, resident of (city/county) and (organization). I am calling in support of **Bounchan Keola**. Bounchan is an incarcerated firefighter who courageously fought on the frontlines of this season of California wildfires. Days after being seriously injured fighting the Zogg Fire, CDCR handed him over to ICE for deportation to Laos, a country he fled as a child refugee. Weeks earlier, Governor Newsom handed **Kao Saelee**, another refugee and incarcerated firefighter over to ICE, and has ignored calls from thousands of people to pardon Kao Saelee and halt ICE transfers. Will Governor Newsom reunite **Bounchan and Kao** with their families by granting them pardons and stop ICE transfers?”



**Sample Tweets to Governor Newsom @GavinNewsom**

Boun Keola and Kao Saelee defended California from the worst wildfires in state history. Now, we need to #DefendBoun and #FreeSaelee from ICE. Demand that Gov @GavinNewsom grant them a pardon and #StopICETransfers.

During the worst wildfires in California history, Boun Keola and Kao Saelee risked their lives to keep us safe. We need Gov @GavinNewsom to grant them pardons today and #StopICETransfers. #DefendBoun #FreeSaelee

.@GavinNewsom #DefendBoun by granting him a pardon. **Boun** is a valuable community member, who deserves to be reunited with his family & community. After serving over 20 yrs, fighting CA fires, his healing has been overlooked, simply because he is a refugee.

.@GavinNewsom you have the power to end state prison to ICE transfers, so why haven't you? Boun served 22 years in state prison, fought CA fires, and nearly died protecting us. Yet, he was still transferred to ICE. Stand with immigrants and #DefendBoun. #FreeThemAll

Boun is a Khmu refugee, who fled during the Viet Nam war. As an indigenous minority in Laos, Boun has limited resources & support if he is deported. #DefendBoun now! He belongs with his family & community here.

Boun courageously served on the frontlines during some of the worst wildfires in CA history. @GavinNewsom's bill of hiring incarcerated firefighters (AB 2147) does not include immigrants nor protect them from deportation, like Boun Keon. Stop the hypocrisy Newsom!

Boun is an incarcerated Khmu refugee and firefighter who was injured fighting the Zogg fires. Besides initial treatment, Boun has not received follow-up care for his brave efforts but instead was transferred to ICE for deportation. @GavinNewsom #DefendBoun and pardon him now!

.@GavinNewsom Boun Keoun is an incarcerated Khmu refugee from Laos who experienced his family's home country torn apart by the VietNam war. The US prison system and deportation machine only continue to fragment families and communities. #DefendBoun and keep families together!

.@GavinNewsom Both Boun and Kao ([bit.ly/FreeSaelee](https://bit.ly/FreeSaelee)) were sent to prison as teenagers, turned their lives around, fought CA fires, and still were handed over to ICE. Stand with immigrants and #DefendBoun and #FreeSaelee by granting them pardons. #FreeThemAll #StopICETransfers!



## Biography

Read more about Kao Saelee here - [bit.ly/FreeSaelee](https://bit.ly/FreeSaelee)

**Boun Keola** is a Khmu refugee from Laos. The Khmu people, including Boun's family, fought alongside the U.S. military during the Viet Nam War. Following the U.S. withdrawal, the Lao government actively sought to wipe out the Khmu and other ethnic minorities who had sided with the United States forcing them to flee the country. In 1988, Boun entered the U.S. as a child of war who had witnessed unspeakable violence, famine, and devastation. Boun, his parents, and yting Mr. Keola for wearing used clothing and being Asian. Boun's experience is similar to that of an entire generation of refugee children who dealt with bullying and school systems that lacked culturally competent resources to help them.

Boun began skipping school to escape his bullies and began hanging out with other refugee youth, a group of children that came together for security and safety. They got into trouble for petty offenses like smoking and underage drinking and later became a gang engaging in violence by the time they were teenagers. At 16, Boun and a group of other youth shot from a car at rival gang members, leaving one person dead and an innocent bystander wounded. Boun was charged as an adult and accepted a plea deal for 28 years in prison.

Boun carries deep remorse for decisions he made as a teenager and deep remorse for the people who were harmed for those decisions. Today, Boun is not an impulsive and scared 16-year-old but a mature adult committed to leading a productive life and making amends for harm he caused. Boun volunteered to train and serve as a firefighter while incarcerated.

In the past few months, Boun was on the frontlines of several major fires including the Bear, Gold, CZU Complex, Glenn Lighting, and Zogg wildfires. On October 2, 2020, Boun was fighting the Zogg fire when an airdrop from a helicopter caused trees to collapse on Boun and two other firefighters.

Boun was airlifted to Mercy Hospital in Redding. After being discharged with neck and back injuries and told to return for follow-up care, he was placed in solitary confinement at Folsom State Prison. For nearly two weeks, Mr. Keola was held without a pen or access to a phone to tell his family that he had been injured. On October 16, 2020, Mr. Keola was handed over to ICE for deportation. Despite experiencing excruciating pain and unable to move his neck, Boun has not received any follow up medical care aside from Tylenol and a neck brace.

There is strong community support for Boun's application for a pardon. A pardon does not erase the harm caused by Boun in his youth nor does it erase his lifelong commitment to making amends. Rather, a pardon

recognizes that Boun has worked to make amends and allows him to continue serving the only place he has ever called home. Boun's explains:

“Despite what my papers might say, I feel that I am an American and a Californian. This country and this state are the only home I have known. Being a Californian means believing that people can turn their lives around and deserve second chances but also that we are tied together and owe a duty to serve one another. I have tried my best to earn that second chance and hope you can see that. I believe I have a duty to care for my parents who have endured so much and also a duty to continue making amends by protecting California as a firefighter. I hope to be able to do that.”

Boun plans to take advantage of AB 2147, which Gov. Newsom recently signed allowing formerly incarcerated firefighters to continue serving after their release, but cannot serve if ordered deported. The community encourages Gov. Newsom to protect Boun from deportation by granting him a pardon and also halt future transfers of Californians to ICE.



## Graphics and Photos



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## Demand Gov. Newsom Pardon Detained Firefighter and Refugee Bouchan Keola

[bit.ly/DefendBoun](https://bit.ly/DefendBoun)



## Call Script to Gov. Newsom (916-445-2841)

*"Hi my name is \_\_\_, resident of (city/county) and (organization). I am calling in support of Bouchan Keola. Bouchan is an incarcerated firefighter who courageously fought on the frontlines of this season of California wildfires. Days after being seriously injured fighting the Zogg Fire, CDCR handed him over to ICE for deportation to Laos, a country he fled as a child refugee. Weeks earlier, Governor Newsom handed Kao Saelee, another refugee and incarcerated firefighter over to ICE, and has ignored calls from thousands of people to pardon Kao Saelee and halt ICE transfers. Will Governor Newsom reunite Bouchan and Kao with their families by granting them pardons and stop ICE transfers?"*

**Image Description (left):** Graphite illustration of detained firefighter and refugee Bouchan Keola. Text reads “#DefendBoun #StopICETransfers #FreeThemAll” followed by “Demand Gov. Newsom Pardon Detained Firefighter and Refugee Bouchan Keola” and “bit.ly/DefendBoun”.

**Image Description (right):** Text reads “Call script to Gov. Newsom 916 445 2841” followed by “Hi my name is \_\_\_, resident of (city/county) and (organization). I am calling in support of **Bouchan Keola**.”

**Bouchan** courageously fought on the frontlines of the largest fires in California history as an incarcerated firefighter this past wildfire season. On October 2, 2020, Bouchan was seriously injured fighting the Zogg Fire. Just days later, he was handed over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and has not received follow-up care. In addition to dealing with medical issues from his injury, he now also faces deportation to Laos, a country he fled as a child refugee. Given the rising rates of COVID-19 in prisons and ICE detention, continuing to transfer community members like Bouchan over to ICE endangers lives and worsens the public health situation. Weeks earlier, Governor Newsom handed Kao Saelee, another refugee and incarcerated firefighter over to ICE and has ignored calls from hundreds of thousands of people to pardon him and halt transfers. Will Governor Newsom reunite Bouchan with his family and community by granting him a pardon and stop ICE transfers to save lives?

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**Demand Gov.  
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and Refugee  
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