

The Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act of 2026

The Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act of 2026 (SEADRA) is historic legislation that would stop the deportations of Southeast Asian refugees, including Cambodian, Iu Mien, Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese individuals.

Background:

After the War in Southeast Asia (more commonly known as the “Vietnam War”), millions of refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam fled ethnic cleansing and political persecution. Many Southeast Asian families and individuals who fled had fought alongside or otherwise supported the United States during the war. The U.S. Government recognized its responsibility to protect our allies and those impacted by our actions in that region, thus resettling over 1.2 million Southeast Asian refugees in the United States between 1975 and 2008. To this day, this resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees constitutes the largest refugee resettlement program in U.S. history.

Many Southeast Asian families were resettled into heavily disinvested communities without adequate access to socio-economic resources and mental health treatment as they grappled with the trauma of war, genocide, and mass carpet bombings. As Southeast Asian families struggled to resettle in this country, many Southeast Asian youth were caught up in the same unforgiving pipeline as many other low-income youths in underserved neighborhoods, making mistakes that led to criminal convictions and incarceration.

Although many have since rebuilt their lives and given back to their communities, over 2,000 Southeast Asian Americans have already been deported, and currently about 15,000 still live in the United States with a final order of removal. These individuals are now being removed for convictions from over two decades ago and for which they have already served a sentence without a full and just opportunity for rehabilitation. They often have U.S. citizen family members, serve as the primary caregivers in their families, have no recollection of or meaningful ties to their country of origin, and hold deep roots in their local communities here in the U.S.

Solution:

SEADRA aims to end Southeast Asian detentions and deportations. Specifically, this bill:

- Prohibits the detention and deportation of Southeast Asian refugees who arrived in the U.S before 2008;
- Permanently authorizes employment for those with final orders of removal so they can make a living and support their families; and
- Establishes virtual ICE check-ins rather than in-person check-ins, and at the frequency of every 5 years.

Additionally, this year's version of SEADRA expands the impact of the bill to Southeast Asian refugees who have already been deported. By establishing a pathway to return, it allows for Southeast Asian individuals to reopen their cases, come back home to the U.S., and reunite with their families and communities. Additionally, this updated version of the bill allows Southeast Asian refugees who are still in the U.S. to reopen their deportation cases so they can vacate their deportation orders and remain in the U.S.