

Subu Vedam, falsely imprisoned for 43 years, seized by ICE for deportation

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The case of Subramanyam “Subu” Vedam would defy belief were we not living under the fascistic drive toward dictatorship under Donald Trump. For 43 years, Vedam endured the brutality of a Pennsylvania maximum-security prison, wrongfully incarcerated for a crime he did not commit. After lawyers from the Pennsylvania Innocence Project discovered new evidence proving his innocence, his conviction was vacated, and all charges against him were dismissed.

But moments after his release on October 3 from Huntingdon State Correctional Institution, the 64-year-old man of Indian origin was seized and arrested by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), citing a “legacy deportation order” dating back to the 1980s, before his wrongful murder conviction. He was immediately transferred to the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, facing deportation to India, a country he barely knows.

Vedam’s ordeal—shifting from wrongful imprisonment, to exoneration and release, to punitive detention—highlights the overlap of legal injustice and Gestapo-like immigration enforcement, compounding an injustice his family rightly calls a “terrible wrong.”

Subu Vedam was convicted in 1983 and sentenced to life without parole for the 1980 shooting death of his friend, 19-year-old Thomas Kinser. Throughout the decades of his imprisonment, he consistently maintained his innocence, declining multiple plea bargains because of his “strong desire to clear his name.”

In 2022, lawyers working with the Innocence Project discovered new evidence exposing critical prosecutorial misconduct. The evidence, which had been illegally withheld from defense lawyers, included an FBI report concluding that the victim was not killed by the bullets from the gun prosecutors attempted to link to Vedam. Specifically, the bullet hole measurements in the concealed evidence were too small to have come from the .25-caliber weapon prosecutors had maintained was used in the killing.

On August 28, 2025, Centre County Court of Common Pleas Judge Jonathan D. Grine ruled in Vedam’s favor,

finding the concealed evidence represented a violation of his constitutional right to due process. The ruling officially vacated the conviction. Centre County District Attorney Bernie Cantorna formally dismissed all charges on October 2, 2025, making Vedam the longest serving exoneree in Pennsylvania history, and one of the longest in the United States, having spent 43 years behind bars.

Vedam’s deportation order was tied to a youthful drug conviction, specifically pleading guilty to intent to distribute LSD when he was 19. While he served his life sentence, the order had remained dormant and he was unable to fight his deportation.

ICE described Vedam as “a career criminal with a rap sheet dating back to 1980” and “a convicted controlled substance trafficker,” stating that individuals with standing removal orders are priorities for enforcement. The claim that Vedam was a career criminal is preposterous, as he was behind bars at the state prison during this supposed “career.”

The claim that ICE is targeting “the worst of the worst” is belied by Vedam’s actions during his time in prison, where he dedicated himself to serving his fellow inmates.

- He received over 51 commendations for volunteer service.
- He helped found and lead the Literacy Council and Family Literacy Project for inmates, obtaining funding from the National Institute of Corrections, and he helped scores of inmates complete their high school degrees.
- He taught himself Spanish to enable him to teach more people to read.
- He organized inmate-sponsored fundraisers for youth offender rehabilitation, such as an annual Runathon.
- He served as an unofficial health counselor, seeking understandable explanations from his physician brother-in-law regarding common inmate health issues like diabetes, obesity and arthritis, and counseling them.

Despite extreme limitations, Vedam attained significant academic achievements. He completed three degrees by correspondence with magna cum laude honors, including a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with a perfect 4.0

GPA. He is recognized as the first inmate in the state prison system in over 150 years to achieve a graduate degree while incarcerated. His interests span global events, economics and science.

A spokesperson for the family noted that Vedam's ICE detention completely blindsided them, as his entire family—including his sister and nieces—are US citizens and his family relationships are established here and in Canada. Vedam's family and supporters have launched a major protest demanding his release, highlighting the cruelty of his current detention and threat of deportation.

His niece, Zoe Miller Vedam, stressed the devastating impact of deportation: "He left India when he was nine months old ... He hasn't been there for over 44 years ... to send him to the other side of the world, to a place he doesn't know, away from everyone who loves him, would just compound that injustice."

Saraswathi Vedam, Vedam's sister, emphasized his dedication, noting he turned his wrongful imprisonment into "a vehicle of service to others."

Vedam was a permanent US resident who arrived as an infant. Lawyer Ava Benach argues that without the wrongful murder conviction, Vedam "would likely have been successful in defending himself in deportation proceedings decades ago," strongly rejecting ICE's description of him as a "career criminal."

Vedam's wrongful conviction was symptomatic of the arbitrary and vengeful character of the US justice system. Collectively, the 2,795 exonerees tracked by the National Registry of Exonerations since 1989 have served more than 25,000 years in prison for crimes they did not commit, with the average time lost for a murder exoneration being 14.1 years.

Since the US Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, 201 people sentenced to death and incarcerated have been exonerated, according to Death Penalty Information. These include individuals who were wrongfully convicted and later cleared of all charges.

The most common reasons for exoneration include official misconduct (such as prosecutors concealing evidence, as happened in Vedam's case), mistaken eyewitness testimony, perjury and false or discredited forensic evidence (such as bite-mark analysis, faulty hair analysis, and "junk science" testimony).

While Vedam faces deportation, the machinery of state-sanctioned death continues its grim work. In a four-day period beginning October 14, four people are scheduled to be executed by lethal injection across four states, including Lance C. Shockley (Missouri) and Samuel Lee Smithers (Florida), both on October 14; Charles Ray Crawford (Mississippi), on October 15; and Richard Djert (Arizona),

October 17.

Rob Roberson was scheduled to be executed October 16 in Texas, but was granted a stay by the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, which sent his case back to district court to determine whether his conviction in the murder of his two-year-old daughter based on debunked "shaken baby syndrome" testimony deserves further review. Texas Governor Greg Abbott and his attorney general, Ken Paxton, are both fervent supporters of the death penalty and Trump's deportation dragnet.

In Florida, one of only two states that gives the governor sole authority to set execution dates, Republican Ron DeSantis has overseen 13 executions so far this year, more than any previous Florida governor. Overall, the US has executed 35 death row inmates so far in 2025, and is on track to carry out 43 state-sanctioned killings, the highest number in more than a decade.

Popular support for the death penalty has steadily decreased since the mid-1990s, when roughly 78 percent of Americans favored it. By 2018, support fell to about 54 percent, and by 2023-2025 support hovered around 53 percent. This growing opposition is driven largely by evolving moral views on capital punishment, concerns about judicial fairness, arbitrary death sentences and wrongful convictions.

By contrast, the Trump administration seeks to ramp up the state killing machine. On Inauguration Day of his second term, Trump signed a sweeping executive order on executions aimed at restoring and expanding the federal death penalty. The order directed the US attorney general to seek the death penalty in all cases where it is legally authorized, particularly aimed at crimes involving the murder of police officers and capital crimes committed by undocumented immigrants.

Subu Vedam's exoneration and immediate seizure by ICE for deportation are an indication of the type of retaliatory "justice" the Trump administration is seeking to cultivate. Despite being cleared of his crime, Vedam has been targeted as a result of the anti-immigrant hysteria that is being mobilized to not only target individuals like him, but as the unconstitutional basis of the deployment of federalized National Guard troops to cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and Portland to counter supposed "domestic terrorism" and violent unrest.



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