

Disgraced ex-Oakland mayor who turned city into crime-ridden, shantytown hellhole embroiled in PROSTITUTION and pay-to-play scandal, feds say

By [ALYSSA GUZMAN, US NEWS REPORTER](#)

A disgraced former Oakland mayor **who turned the California city into a crime-ridden hellhole** has been embroiled in a prostitution and pay-to-play scandal, the federal government said.

Sheng Thao, 41, served as mayor from January 2023 until she was recalled in November 2024. But while she was in office, she allegedly used her political powers to enhance her own interests and roped in a city councilman.

Thao, her boyfriend Andre Jones, and father-son businessmen David and Andy Duong face federal charges for bribery and mail and wire fraud, as they are accused of orchestrating a pay-to-play corruption scheme to enhance the Duongs' businesses, according to federal court documents viewed by the Daily Mail.

Thao also tried to cover up former San Leandro City Councilmember Bryan Azevedo's alleged prostitution usage, in which he allegedly engaged on a business trip to Vietnam alongside the co-conspirators, documents said.

Prosecutors alleged that Thao's scheme began before she was elected into office, with her promising to use her political power to benefit the Duongs' businesses, California Waste Solutions and Evolutionary Homes, which were dependent on city contracts.

In exchange, the Duongs allegedly paid Jones \$300,000-a-year for a 'no-show' job, as well as a trade trip to Vietnam and a vacation for Thao and her son.

Despite Thao arguing that many pieces of evidence should be excluded from the trial, federal prosecutors said these alleged actions help paint the picture of how far the conspiracy went.

In August 2023, Thao went to Vietnam as part of a trade delegation, which included Azevedo, and it was paid by the 'Port of Oakland and subsidized by an organization led and funded by the Duongs,' court papers said.



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Former Oakland Mayor Sheng Thao, 41, is trying to suppress evidence from trial that she knew one of her conspirator engaged in prostitution and illegal drug use while on a business trip with her



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Thao and her boyfriend Andre Jones face federal charges for bribery and mail and wire fraud

'The Duongs paid for Jones to attend the Vietnam trip, as well as Jones' daughter, and several other Oakland officials that Thao invited,' prosecutors alleged.

'After the Vietnam trip, Thao took a vacation to Thailand with her son, a trip that was booked and paid for by a Duong-led organization.'

While on the trip, the Duongs allegedly engaged in a bribery conspiracy with Azevedo, where he agreed to use his power as a councilman to help Evolutionary Homes 'in return for a percentage of the sales prices.'

He was allegedly instructed to open an LLC and a bank account in his wife's name, where the money would be funneled. It was also the same method they used with Thao and Jones, federal prosecutors said.

On the same trip, Azevedo is accused of engaging in activity involving prostitutes and illegal drugs. Months after returning, Thao allegedly became irate when she learned a journalist had begun inquiring about Azevedo's behavior on the trip.

She was allegedly concerned that his actions would 'reflect badly on her and harm her politically,' court documents said.

Staffers allegedly overheard Thao on the phone threatening to stop working with the Duongs if the story came out, allegedly telling David: 'I can't f**k with you anymore.'

The Duongs then took steps to prevent the story from coming out, including paying an 'associate' of the reporter \$10,000 to kill the story, federal prosecutors said.



Father-son businessman David Duong (left) and his son, Andy (right), are also wrapped up in federal charges

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FBI agents taking evidence out of Thao's home in June 2024. Thao has put in a motion to the court to suppress the evidence at trial, but prosecutors argue it all connects to the scheme

Thao's lawyer argued in a motion that the evidence should be excluded from trial as it 'bears no similarity to the charged offenses and invites only an improper character inference.'

'First, the government's claims that it intends to admit this evidence to prove modus operandi rings hollow,' they wrote in court documents.

They called prosecutors' wish to use the 'reed-thin' evidence as 'more prejudicial than probative.'

Jones' attorney Shawn Halbert told the Daily Mail: 'Mr. Jones maintains his innocence and has pled not guilty; he looks forward to the upcoming trial.'

The Daily Mail has reached out to the lawyers for Thao, the Duongs, and the US Attorney's Office for comment.

While Thao was allegedly involved in the conspiracy, she allowed Oakland to become a crime-ridden hellhole, where 15,000 car thefts occurred in one year, a 20% spike in crime, and **become overrun by homeless encampments**.

Car thefts were at their highest in 15 years under Thao, where roughly one-third of residents were victims of the crime.

However, less than five percent of those auto theft cases lead to an actual arrest as the California city's understaffed and underfunded police department were preoccupied dealing with the 21 percent spike in violent crime.



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While Oakland mayor, Thao allowed the city to become a crime-ridden hellhole that was overrun with homeless encampments



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Under her, car thefts were also at a 15-year high as the city descended into chaos

And there were also just two police officers assigned to deal with car theft. Tight police resources were reportedly being directed towards higher-priority crimes.

By mid-2024, a gigantic 'shantytown' had popped up in Oakland. Makeshift dwellings littered the side of an entire street.