

15. Nenko Stanev Gantchev

Who was Nenko Stanev Gantchev? Nenko Stanev Gantchev first came to Chicago 30 years ago from Bulgaria on a student visa. After that, he applied for and received a work permit. Nenko Gantchev married in 2017; his wife said he was in the process of applying for a green card through their marriage.

For more than a decade Nenko owned and operated a trucking company called "J & D Boys"; he loved his job. As a friend described him, Nenko . . . "was just a wonderful human being, very, very docile, very good natured, funny, you know, just very helpful, the kind that would stick up for his friends. If you needed something, he would be there for you." Vanya, another friend who previously worked with Gantchev, said Nenko was one of the hardest workers she knew.

How did Nenko Stanev Gantchev end up in ICE custody? Nenko was arrested by ICE on Sept. 23, 2025, when he showed up for an interview to discuss his green card application at the USCIS Chicago office. His wife said agents appeared out of nowhere, seemingly waiting for him to arrive. He was arrested during the autumn immigration enforcement operation targeting undocumented immigrants (Operation "Midway Blitz"). He was held and then died at North Lake Correctional Facility in Baldwin, Michigan. He was awaiting a hearing on his bond case when he died. The facility where Nenko was detained is owned by GEO Group, one of the largest private prison companies in the country. Nenko's wife and friends claim he complained for months about worsening health. He suffered from type 2 diabetes and said his diet was not adjusted to his condition. "There was no special diet. The food they were given was not adequate to maintain blood sugar levels," said family friend Ana.

How did Nenko Stanev Gantchev die under ICE custody? Nearly three months after being detained, on December 16, 2025, on the day of he and his wife's eight-year wedding anniversary, Nenko's wife was notified of his death. His wife began to think something was wrong on the prior Monday evening when his regular phone call did not come. The following morning, the Bulgarian embassy informed her that Nenko had died. Ganchev's family and friends have many questions regarding his deteriorating health over his months in custody, as well as what exactly happened on the day of his death. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said Ganchev's death is thought to have occurred from "natural causes," but the "official cause of death is still under investigation." He was found unconscious on the floor of his cell during a routine check, after which resuscitation attempts were unsuccessful.

What happened after Nenko Stanev Gantchev died? "We had a very good life together, this is very hard for me," said Nenko's wife. A close family friend, "Anna," who asked not to use her last name out of fears for her safety, was there on Gantchev's courthouse wedding day, and is still in shock over what has happened. "I think it's a big mess, everyone knows he's a good person and hard worker. He had real estate here. He had a business here. He was here a very long time. He very much wanted to be an American citizen. He was married to an American citizen."

"I want people to know what happened to him. A man who lived here for 30 years, worked hard, paid taxes — and they treated him like an animal," said Nenko's wife, a U.S. citizen who asked

to remain anonymous out of fear of retaliation by federal authorities. "They were so rough with him... They treated him as if he were a murderer."

Chicago Congresswoman Delia Ramirez has called for an "immediate, transparent investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Gantchev's death, including an investigation into reports from other detainees that he asked for medical assistance and did not receive it in time to save his life."

Sources:

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