

# Denver Mayor Mike Johnston rebukes Congressional Republicans after committee request to testify on "sanctuary city" policies

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Austen Erblat

## Local News

Denver Mayor Mike Johnston criticized some Congressional Republicans after they asked him to testify in a hearing on immigration and so-called "sanctuary jurisdictions."

The U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform -- made up of 26 Republicans and 27 Democrats -- sent a letter to Johnston on Monday asking him to testify on Feb. 11 in Washington, D.C. Johnston didn't immediately indicate if he would agree to that, but did issue a statement criticizing Republicans in Congress on immigration.

"The most helpful thing Congressional Republicans could do right now is fix our broken immigration system. While they work on that, we will focus on running the cities that manage the consequences of their failure to act," Johnston said through a spokesperson Monday night.

Asked whether Johnston would attend the hearing, a spokesperson for the Mayor's Office did not immediately respond.



Mayor Mike Johnston unveiled his first budget for the city since being elected in June at Denver City and County building library room in Denver, Colorado on Thursday, Sept. 14, 2023. Hyoung Chang/The Denver Post via Getty Images

The letter to Johnston from Committee Chair James Comer, a Republican from Kentucky, says Denver's and Colorado's laws prevent federal officials from enforcing immigration laws. These so-called "sanctuary city" laws refer to state or local laws and ordinances that limit or prevent local and state governments and agencies from cooperating with federal immigration officials in at least some cases.

"Denver is a sanctuary jurisdiction that refuses to fully cooperate with federal immigration enforcement," the letter reads, in part. "To provide much needed oversight of this matter, the Committee requests documents and information related to the sanctuary policies of Denver."

Similar letters were sent to Boston Mayor Michelle Wu, Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, and New York City Mayor Eric Adams.

"There are about 12 states and hundreds of cities and counties with sanctuary laws or policies across the country," the letter continued. "Four cities, however, stand out in their abject failure to comply with federal law: Chicago, New York City, Denver, and Boston. Citizens of all four cities have suffered due to sanctuary policies."



Committee ranking member Rep. James Comer (R-KY) attends a House Oversight Committee hearing titled Examining the Practices and Profits of Gun Manufacturers in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill July 27, 2022 in Washington, D.C. Drew Angerer / Getty Images

Researchers who study the intersection of crime and immigration status broadly agree that immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than U.S. citizens.

An analysis of the 2010 census and the American Communities Survey done by the non-profit American Immigration Council, immigrants to the U.S. are "significantly" less likely than native-born citizens to be incarcerated. The authors found that 1.6 percent of immigrant men aged 18-39 are incarcerated, compared to 3.3 percent of U.S.-born men.

A 2024 study by the U.S. Department of Justice analyzed crime rates from 2012 to 2018 with a focus on undocumented immigrants and found similar conclusions.

"During this time, undocumented immigrants had the lowest offending rates overall for both total felony crime and violent felony crime compared to other groups," the study found. "U.S.-born citizens had the highest offending rates overall for most crime types, with documented immigrants generally falling between the other two groups."

The issue of "sanctuary" jurisdictions has been a frequent topic of discussion by President Donald Trump, both during his first term and again recently. He specifically mentioned Aurora -- Denver's neighbor to the east -- and promised increased immigration enforcement there when he visited for a campaign stop in October.

"I will rescue Aurora and every town that has been invaded and conquered. These towns have been conquered. Explain that to your governor; he doesn't have a clue they've been conquered. And we will put these vicious and bloodthirsty criminals in jail or kick them out of our country," Trump said at the time at a rally at the Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center near Denver International Airport.

On Sunday, the DEA and local law enforcement raided a party at what agents described as a "makeshift nightclub" just north of Denver. DEA officials say agents arrested 49 people, 40 of whom they say were undocumented immigrants. Jonathan Pullen, special agent in charge of the DEA's Rocky Mountain Field Division, said the party was organized by the Venezuelan gang Tren De Aragua.

In November, Tom Homan -- selected by Trump to be the "border czar" and architect of the first Trump White House's "zero tolerance" policy toward immigration -- appeared on Fox News, saying he's "going to enforce the law period, and they're not going to stop us," referring to Johnston and other mayors who have said they will not enforce deportation orders.

Johnston said earlier that week that he's willing to use civil disobedience and, if necessary, go to jail to stop deportations.

Homan responded on Monday, saying, "Look, me and the Denver mayor, we agree on one thing. He's willing to go to jail. I'm willing to put him in jail."

In a one-on-one interview with CBS News Colorado earlier this month, Johnston and several other mayors from around the country called on Congress to approve funding to help cities address migrant populations, pass comprehensive border reform legislation, and invest in stabilizing the countries where a large number of immigrants are coming from -- some of which, the U.S. government had a role in destabilizing.

He also spelled out his stance on cooperation with federal immigration enforcement last week.

He said Denver, where more than 40,000 migrants have arrived since early 2023, would work with ICE to arrest violent criminals. But he said the city would go to court if immigration raids targeted schools, among other places.

"We're not going to be bullied or blackmailed out of our values," he told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Raquel Lane-Arellano of the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition raised concerns over immigration raids and certain rhetoric and the impact they can have on immigrant families and communities, regardless of legal status.

"When people go into ICE custody they don't get access to due process in the same way they do in the criminal justice system," she told CBS News Colorado on Sunday. "They are not going to call the police if they think the police are going to report them to ICE."

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[Austen Erblat](#)

Austen Erblat is a digital producer and assignment editor at CBS News Colorado and is Covering Colorado First.

Originally from South Florida, he's been working as a journalist in Denver since 2022.

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