

In red states, anti-immigrant bills are failing as businesses push back

Most of the roughly 200 bills targeting immigrants around the country this year have stalled or died, with help from business and Christian groups.

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By [Lauren Kaori Gurley](#)

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In Tennessee, a bill championed by White House adviser Stephen Miller would allow public schools to deny enrollment to undocumented children. In Idaho, employers would have been forced to use the government E-Verify system to stop undocumented immigrants from getting jobs. In Utah, undocumented immigrants would have been denied public assistance for vaccines or food for pregnant mothers.

But [businesses](#) and [Christian groups](#) helped block each of those proposals from becoming law.

“Business leaders across various industries are nervous about the many immigration-focused bills being proposed or that have recently passed at the state level, which negatively impact the workforce,” said Jennie Murray, president of the National Immigration Forum, an advocacy organization that represents Fortune 500 companies.

In fact, of the roughly 200 bills targeting legal and undocumented immigrants in state legislatures this year, fewer than two dozen have made it into law so far, according to a Washington Post analysis of data from the American Immigration Council. More than 80 of the measures have died, multiple were vetoed, and dozens more have made little progress this spring legislative season, although several state legislatures are still in session.

Many of the bills share common goals and similar texts, and they reflect the immigration enforcement priorities of the Trump administration.

But much of the most aggressive legislation has stalled after failing to gain traction, even in red states such as Alabama, Florida, Mississippi and Idaho.

“Still crazy that Idaho legislators are killing every single bill we got on illegal immigration,” Republican Idaho state Sen. Brian Lenney wrote on X on March 17.

Western Civ Maximalist 

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Still crazy that Idaho legislators are killing every single bill we got on illegal immigration.

I guess [@GovernorLittle](#) really isnt on the [@realDonaldTrump](#) train after-all eh?

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In Utah, Republican state Rep. Cheryl Acton called a bill that would have denied public services to undocumented immigrants a “violation, really, of the Sermon on the Mount.” The measure never got a sponsor in the state Senate, after being introduced by Republican state Rep. Trevor Lee, who told The Post that the White House was “very supportive” of the bill. When asked if the White House pressured him to introduce the bill, Lee demurred.



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“I wouldn’t call it pressure, more just what can we do to help you guys now that we have the border sealed,” Lee said about the White House’s role advocating for the bill. “What can we do as a state [to help the White House]”?

Abigail Jackson, a White House spokeswoman, told The Post in a statement that “The Trump Administration has led a government-wide, transformational effort to remake how we address public safety in America. ... It’s not surprising that states across the country want to imitate President Trump’s successful policies on a state level.”

At a time when Congress is gridlocked, more Republican-controlled states are stepping up to try to implement the Trump administration’s agenda to restrict immigration.

The U.S. Senate, for example, has failed to advance a Trump-endorsed bill, the Save America Act, which would require proof of citizenship to register to vote, among other restrictions. A dozen states have introduced legislation that mirrors the congressional bill. And at least five states have passed it, including Kansas, where a veto by the governor was overridden.

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“This year it’s very clear that the state trends are around mandated law enforcement cooperation with ICE, denying access to benefits, banning noncitizen voting and requiring E-Verify,” said Victoria Francis, deputy director of state and local initiatives at the American Immigration Council.

Tennessee is one of about 10 states this year that have considered bills to prevent undocumented and noncitizen students from accessing public schools and colleges. As of Friday, none of the measures had been enacted.

Earlier this month, the Tennessee state Senate dropped the bill limiting undocumented students at schools from the legislative calendar after widespread pushback from businesses, educators and clergy.

Martha Boggs, the owner of Bistro at the Bijou, a neighborhood restaurant in Knoxville, said she fiercely opposed the bill for moral and economic reasons. She, along with 350 business owners and educators, signed letters opposing the legislation organized by the Tennessee Small Business Alliance.

“I see the effects of [Trump’s immigration policies] from the business end, because I’ve been in the restaurant business for 40 years,” Boggs said. “I know that our meatpacking plants are run by immigrant workers. Our agriculture business is run by immigrant labor. This impacts me because you see higher wholesale prices.”

From the White House, Miller has also recently suggested Texas lawmakers end public education funding for undocumented children, though a bill has yet to be introduced, according to a New York Times report. A White House official said Texas lawmakers were providing a legislative update to White House staff and this issue came up during that discussion.

In Idaho, the Heritage Foundation and former Trump assistant attorney general Theo Wold helped Republicans craft a package of bills including one that would mandate all employers use E-Verify, a government system that checks work eligibility. The bill passed the state House but died in the Senate in early April, exposing a divide between MAGA Republicans in northern Idaho and the pro-business wing of the party in the southern part of the state, which relies more heavily on immigrant labor.

“The damage it would do to Idaho’s economy would be profound,” said Rick Naerebout, CEO of the Idaho Dairymen’s Association, who lobbied against the bill. “I think business opposition very much had a key role in the Senate having a keen understanding of Idaho’s economy and what would be at risk for Idahoans.”

Idaho lawmakers also held back a bill, supported by Heritage, that would have made assisting undocumented immigrants a crime, after Christian clergy and a local sheriff, among others, packed a hearing room to oppose it.

“Every priest knows that in every one of those [churches] many of the people in that congregation are here illegally,” said Christian Welp, a director at the Catholic Diocese of Boise, in a testimony before lawmakers. “Is he supposed to lock the doors at the end of Mass to call the police?”

In Arizona, one proposal would make it illegal for banks and check-cashing services to serve undocumented immigrants. The bill resembles an executive action being considered by the White House. It received unanimous support from state Senate Republicans and is awaiting action from the House.

But small and major financial institutions are “opposed to this across the board,” said Steven Killian, a spokesperson at the Arizona Bankers Association, which represents more than 50 banks and credit card companies.

“A banker wants to be a banker. They don’t want to be in the immigration business,” Killian said.

Emily Eng contributed to this report.

Methodology

The Post identified and analyzed the status of more than 200 anti-immigrant bills, with help from the American Immigration Council, that are or were under active consideration in state legislative sessions in 2026. The bills tighten immigration enforcement or aim to restrict immigrants in a number of ways. Similar and companion bills were counted as one bill, regardless of chamber, for the story. This analysis is current as of April 18.

What readers are saying

The comments reflect a strong debate on immigration policies under the Trump administration, with many criticizing the harsh measures and their economic and social impacts. Commenters express concerns about the reliance on immigrant labor in various industries and the potential... [Show more](#)

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