



Adams County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Dale Wagner
Undersheriff Adolfo Coronado

TESTIMONY OF

Dale J. Wagner

Adams County Washington Sheriff

Ritzville Washington State

BEFORE

Committee of Judiciary

Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security and Enforcement

HEARING ON

Sanctuary Jurisdictions: Magnet for Migrants, Cover for Criminals

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Washington, DC

As the elected Sheriff of Adams County, my responsibility is to uphold the law and ensure public safety. However, Washington State has actively worked to weaken local law enforcement, erode the authority of elected sheriffs, and impose political control over our offices.

The Keep Washington Working (KWW) Act (Sanctuary policies), implemented in 2019, is a clear example of how the state has prioritized political ideology over public safety. This law was deliberately designed to conflict with federal law, making it illegal for local agencies to cooperate with federal partners in cases involving criminal offenders who are unlawfully present in the U.S. **Federal law requires local agencies to share information and detain individuals when necessary. The KWW Act explicitly prohibits it.**

This is not an accident, it is intentional. It has tied the hands of law enforcement, allowed dangerous criminals to reenter communities, and created legal uncertainty for Sheriffs across the state especially those that house prisoners in jail facilities.

The state's overreach does not stop there. Washington States leaders have made it clear they intend to "Trump-proof" the state at, all costs, regardless of the impact on local communities.

In 2022 the Adams County's jail has been closed due to manpower and structural issues, forcing us to transport inmates at a financial and logistical burden, yet the state refuses to provide real solutions.

Instead of helping, they target counties like ours with lawsuits designed to assert dominance.

In a clear David and Goliath situation, Washington State weaponized its full legal power against Adams County, a small, rural county, in an attempt to force the Sheriff into signing a consent decree that would hand over control of my office to the state for four years, immediately after the presidential election.

Adams County sought legal assistance, and we are grateful for Ard Law Group to for representing us in this fight with valuable assistance America First Legal and Cooper and Kirk. Their expertise and support have been invaluable as we push back against this politically motivated legal action. The Attorney General's complaint made it clear that our decision to defend ourselves was the real reason for the state's retaliation. This lawsuit was a political attack, not a public safety measure.

The state has also taken broader legislative steps to strip the Sheriffs of their independence. This year, Washington, with the backing of certain NGOs, pushed House Bill 1399—a direct assault on the office of sheriff. HB 1399 would have allowed the governor to remove an elected sheriff without due process. It sought to shift power from voters to state officials, undermining the people's ability to choose their own law enforcement leadership.

This is about control, control over Sheriffs who refuse to comply with the state's political agenda and control over local governments that push back against overreach.

Adding to these concerns, Adams County has witnessed firsthand the consequences of these misguided policies. In recent years, illegal aliens have been arrested and charged with serious

crimes in our county, cases that have made both local and national headlines. These crimes include violent assaults, drug trafficking, and even murder.

One of the most horrific examples was the brutal killing that took place in our county, where an individual unlawfully present in the U.S. was arrested and charged with murder. This case, along with others involving repeat offenders who were previously deported but returned due to lax enforcement, underscores the real dangers posed by policies that shield criminals from federal immigration authorities. Our hands have been tied from working with federal partners to ensure that these individuals face justice and are removed from our communities before they can harm again.

A particularly shocking case in 2021, involved the brutal killings of two women in Othello. Mauricio Nava-Garibay, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, was arrested and charged with two counts of first-degree murder and removal or concealment of a body. The victims, a female 57 and a female 30, were found dismembered in a car. Nava-Garibay admitted to police that he killed the two women, dismembered their bodies, and disposed of them in a Honda Accord. The 30-year-old female who had autism and the mental capacity of a 5-year-old was unable to fight back. The crime scene was described as “gruesome,” and the case made national headlines.

This case demonstrates how such crimes impact a small community in a very big way. We were very fortunate to have great detectives who were able to determine the identity of this illegal alien, locate him, and bring him to justice. Though Nava-Garibay was arrested, found guilty, and will be serving a long sentence, we were fortunate. This case demonstrates the importance of working together at the local, state, and federal level.

Adams County does not arrest or detain individuals based solely on immigration status. However, when serious crimes are committed, it is essential that law enforcement has the ability to work with all levels of government to ensure justice is served and public safety is maintained.

I have dedicated my career to protecting Adams County and ensuring that the sheriff's office remains committed to its community-first approach. I have been with the Adams County Sheriff's Office since 1997 and, during that time, have been a certified police officer in the state. I have held multiple positions, such as Patrol Deputy, D.A.R.E. Instructor, Taser Instructor, Hostage Negotiator, Detective in Major Crimes, Member of the Regional Columbia Basin Investigative Team, Patrol Sergeant, Undersheriff, and Sheriff since 2015. In 2005 I was honored with the distinguished Adams County award for valor for my actions during an major incident where another Deputy was shot multiple times by an illegal alien.

Under my leadership, the men and women of the Adams County Sheriff's Office reflect the hardworking and resilient nature of the county. Employees are hired based on merit and their commitment to public service, ensuring a professional and effective department. We are a very diverse department with professionals of all races, and genders. Adams County is known for its rich agricultural industry, which is the backbone of our local economy.

The county produces a significant portion of the state's potatoes, wheat, apples, and other crops, contributing to Washington's position as a leading agricultural state. A safe and effective

partnership between law enforcement and the community is crucial to maintaining the stability and success of our agricultural sector.

Our mottos, "Service Above Self" and "We Police Who We Love," embody the dedication and personal commitment we have to our community. Public safety is not just a job, it is a responsibility we take seriously because we live here, raise our families here, and want the best for our neighbors.

In closing, the Keep Washington Working law appears to cause constitutional challenges for Sheriffs. In our oath of office, we swear to uphold both the State and Federal constitutions. Sheriffs find it very difficult when State conflicts with federal. It is my view that the KWW is dangerous and sets an unconstitutional precedence that states can bypass federal law and implement defiant, and laws based on ideology rather than true public safety.

In my opinion, what needs to change?

1. Remove conflicts between the State and federal restrictions placed by the KWW or sanctuary policy and restore Cooperation with all Federal Agencies, Sheriffs must have the discretion to work with all local, state, and federal partners when criminals are involved and be able to clearly follow the constitution of both state and federal without conflict or political interference.
2. Protect the Independence of Elected Sheriffs -- The state must stop using lawsuits and legislation to erode local authority.
3. End the Weaponization of State Power -- Local governments should not be targeted for political reasons or coerced into compliance.
4. Protect and preserve the constitution of the United States of America

Adams County has taken a stand not for politics, but for the rule of law, public safety, and the integrity of the sheriff's office as an independent, elected position.

In my view, this is not just about Adams County this is about every sheriff in Washington State and every citizen who believes in accountable law enforcement.

We must reject the political interference that undermines public safety and defend the principles that allow sheriffs to serve their communities effectively.

Public safety should never be sacrificed for politics.

Thank you,
Sheriff Wagner

