

County sheriffs file lawsuit challenging Community Trust Act

Federal suit says law aimed at reining in immigration enforcement will ‘obstruct’ sheriffs’ work, jeopardize public safety

BY **WILLIAM J. FORD** - MAY 27, 2026 9:06 AM



📷 Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler, the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit against the state of Maryland, said Wednesday the General Assembly's passage of the Community Trust Act has made the state "an ultrasanctuary state" for immigrants. (Photo by William J. Ford/Maryland Matters)

The majority of Maryland's 24 sheriffs filed a civil suit in federal court Tuesday to block the Community Trust Act, which the suit said would hamper sheriffs' obligation to work with federal authorities to combat illegal immigration.

The [civil suit](#), filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Greenbelt by sheriffs from 17 counties, claims the law would "intentionally obstruct federal law enforcement and thwart Plaintiffs' obligation to uphold the Constitution of the United States."

"Maryland's blatant defiance of federal immigration law is not merely a political disagreement or passive abstention; it is deliberate, disruptive action that jeopardizes the public safety of all Americans," the suit says.

The suit was filed by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that works to restrict immigration, on behalf of sheriffs from Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Cecil, Dorchester, Frederick, Garrett, Harford, Kent, Queen Anne's, St. Mary's, Somerset, Talbot, Washington, Wicomico and Worcester counties.

"This legislation is not about trust, and it's certainly not about supporting the law-abiding members of our community. It is an intentional state-mandated obstruction of public safety," said Harford County Sheriff Jeffrey Gahler at an Annapolis news conference Wednesday morning.

"It forbids us from sharing information with federal authorities and prohibits us from honoring immigration detainers, forcing us to release criminal illegal offenders right back into the streets of our Maryland communities," said Gahler, the lead plaintiff on the suit.

Gahler was backed by the other sheriffs on the suit, victims' advocates and the [director of FAIR](#). Gahler described Maryland as an "ultrasanctuary state," after the Democratic-controlled legislature approved the act and Gov. Wes Moore (D) refused to veto it, allowing the bill to become law without his signature.



📷 Federation for American Immigration Reform Executive Director Dave Wilcox speaks Wednesday on the lawsuit by 17 Maryland sheriffs challenging the Community Trust Act. (Photo by William J. Ford/Maryland Matters)

Besides Moore, the suit lists the state of Maryland and Attorney General Anthony Brown (D) as defendants. Brown's office said Wednesday morning that it would not comment on the court case.

The suit comes more than a month after the [Community Trust Act](#) was passed, on the last day of the legislative session, and just days after Moore said he would not sign the bill, but would let it become law [without his signature](#).

Moore's spokesperson Ammar Moussa reiterated in an email Wednesday that the state will work with federal authorities but – quoting language from the governor's Friday letter – will "not let untrained, unqualified, and unaccountable ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] agents deputize our law enforcement officers to do immigration work."

"We respect the role sheriffs play in protecting their communities, and we recognize that there are implementation questions that will need to be worked through," Moussa said. "But the governor's position has not changed: Maryland can support law enforcement, protect constitutional rights, and keep our communities safe at the same time."

The act, [Senate Bill 791](#), was sponsored by Sen. Clarence Lam (D-Anne Arundel and Howard), and would end the practice of accepting administrative warrants from federal ICE agents to hold immigrant detainees. Under the law, local law enforcement officials would only be obligated to recognize a judicial warrant from an ICE agent.

The act has been called a necessary complement to the emergency bill passed and signed early in the legislative session that banned so-called [287\(g\) agreements](#), formal cooperation agreements between ICE and local law enforcement agencies.

Eight of the nine Maryland counties with 287(g) agreements [immediately dropped](#) them, and the ninth said the agreement would no longer be enforced. But immigration advocates feared that sheriffs would just continue to work with ICE on an informal basis, which is why they pushed for passage of the Community Trust Act.

Lam said in an interview Wednesday the sheriffs who filed the suit had ample opportunity to express their concerns during this year's 90-day session and "provide constructive feedback."

"Instead, they held multiple press conferences to mislead the public," he said. "Now they're filing a thinly veiled, poorly constructed lawsuit to fight a bill that duly passed the General Assembly, and we believe has every likelihood of standing up to judicial scrutiny."

But House Minority Leader Jason Buckel (R-Allegany), who showed up for Wednesday's news conference with the sheriffs, said the administrative warrant process in the act has always been an acceptable method for holding a detainee. In addition, he said, a judicial warrant can take longer to process than an administrative one.

"It is just throwing up another roadblock to the commonsense enforcement of the law," he said.