

COLUMNISTS

Sanctuary cities are sanctuaries for criminals

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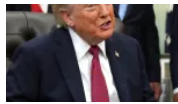


FILE - A U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent is seen in Park Ridge, Ill., Sept. 19, 2025. (AP Photo/Erin Hooley, File)

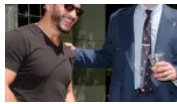
“SANCTUARY CITIES ARE SANCTUARIES FOR CRIMINALS.” In recent days, it has become clear that the Battle of Minneapolis is, at its core, a battle over the continued existence of sanctuary cities.

During the 2024 presidential campaign, President Donald Trump promised to pursue “the worst of the worst” of illegal immigrants. As of September 30, 2024, Immigration and Customs Enforcement **reported** that there were 1,426,932 people who were in the country illegally and who had received a final order of deportation from an immigration judge. Many Trump supporters thought those people were the best place for Trump to begin a ramp-up of federal immigration law enforcement. After all, they have already gotten full legal due process — and an order to go.

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Then there are the illegal immigrants who are jailed for various offenses, who, when they are released, could be subject to deportation proceedings on the basis of their crimes. That is where a key part of the sanctuary city practice comes in. When an illegal immigrant criminal is released, officials should notify ICE, which can then pick up the criminal in an orderly way. But sanctuary city laws forbid officials from notifying ICE, so if ICE wants to find the newly-freed criminal, it will have to do so on its own. That can lead to the kind of difficult operations in neighborhoods that have been the focus of protests in Minneapolis.

Minnesota state officials have pointed out that the state Department of Corrections actually cooperates with ICE. “Minnesota DOC honors ICE detainers and coordinates custody transfers every day,” the Department **said in a statement**.

But that’s just part of the story; a *New York Times analysis* found a “complicated picture” in Minnesota. “About 30% of the people ICE detained in Minnesota last year were turned over by local jails and prisons,” the Times reported, “but that number is a lower share than in 39 other states.” In Iowa, for example, the figure is 80%.”

The Times continued: “In addition, no one was transferred from the state’s largest jail, in Hennepin County, which contains Minneapolis, the state’s largest city. Local jails in Minnesota have declined or ignored hundreds of the more than 2,000 detainers, requests to hold someone longer in detention until ICE can take custody of them, filed since President Trump took office last January.”

That is the issue at the bottom of the Battle of Minneapolis. Trump border czar Tom Homan **went straight to the matter** when he met the press on Thursday after talking with local officials. “Like I’ve said many times for the last several years, even before this administration, jurisdictions that refuse to cooperate with federal immigration authorities are sanctuaries for criminals,” Homan said. “Sanctuary cities are sanctuaries for criminals.”

It was a moment of clarity. When a sanctuary city proclaims itself a sanctuary, it’s reasonable to ask: A sanctuary for whom? And the answer is, a sanctuary for criminals. It is an odd position for a state or local government to put itself in, especially since it is responsible for enforcing the law. But there it is.

President Donald Trump has threatened to cut funding for sanctuary cities. “They do everything possible to protect criminals at the expense of American citizens,” **Trump said** in a January 16 speech at the Detroit Economic Club. “And it breeds fraud and crime and all of the other problems that come, so we’re not making any payment to anybody that supports sanctuary cities.”

On Friday, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) announced that he had received a pledge from leadership that the Senate will hold a vote on **Graham’s new bill** to “end sanctuary city policies forever.” The bill would basically forbid all the methods state and local officials employ to shield criminals from federal law enforcement.

There could be no better example of what Graham’s bill is about than the current mess in Minneapolis. There’s no assurance a sanctuary city ban could pass Congress, and then there is no assurance such a law could survive constitutional challenges. But there are two standards of justice for criminal illegal immigrants in the United States – those who live in sanctuary jurisdictions and those who live in the rest of the country. Minneapolis has shown how crazy that system can be.

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