

HOUSING AND URBAN ISSUES

## The Unacceptable Risk Sanctuary Cities Pose for Public Safety

The consequences of sanctuary policies extend far beyond the ideological debate surrounding immigration enforcement. These policies enable criminal networks to make communities more dangerous.

OPINION | Feb. 24, 2025 • John Fabricatore, Heritage Foundation, TNS



An immigrant rights supporter wears a "Make Los Angeles a Sanctuary City" shirt before a march on International Migrants Day on Dec. 18, 2024. (Mario Tama/Getty Images/TNS)

The House Oversight Committee **is investigating the policies of sanctuary jurisdictions** in Boston, Chicago, Denver and New York City. These cities, which refuse to fully cooperate with federal immigration enforcement, claim they are protecting immigrant communities. However, their policies have far-reaching consequences that hinder federal law enforcement's ability to combat crime effectively.

I spent more than two decades working for Immigration and Customs Enforcement and its predecessor, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. I've seen firsthand the essential role that cooperation between ICE and local law enforcement plays in protecting

communities. By refusing to participate in civil immigration enforcement or assisting federal authorities in enforcing immigration laws, sanctuary cities are creating significant barriers to maintaining public safety.

For example, Chicago's [Welcoming City Ordinance](#) prohibits the Chicago Police Department from assisting ICE in civil immigration operations. Mayor Brandon Johnson recently said: "The Welcoming City Ordinance is a law, and it is the law of the land here in Chicago," vowing to uphold it to ensure immigrant communities feel safe.

While the intent may seem noble, the practical implications of such an ordinance paint a troubling picture. Sanctuary policies effectively allow dangerous people to evade ICE and continue committing crimes across the country.

Sanctuary cities hinder ICE's ability to apprehend and remove people who pose threats to American communities. Consider the crimes committed by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua, or TdA. Many people have seen [the video](#) of TdA terrorizing an apartment in Aurora, Colo. This transnational criminal organization, which President Joe Biden's administration placed sanctions on last year, has ties to human trafficking, drug trafficking and money laundering.

A recent raid on a TdA party in Colorado led to [the arrest of 49 people](#), 41 of whom were in the United States without permanent legal status. Without local law enforcement and ICE cooperation, such operations would be far less effective, leaving communities vulnerable to these dangerous networks.

Additionally, Mexican drug cartels responsible for fentanyl entering the United States are operating in cities across the nation. The Drug Enforcement Administration has reported the connection between these cartels and the influx of illegal drugs devastating our communities. Sanctuary policies enable these criminal organizations to continue their operations and perpetuate the overdose epidemic.

ICE's mission is critical to maintaining public safety, but it cannot function effectively without state and local law enforcement collaboration. When law enforcement at all levels works together, communities are safer, and criminal activity is significantly reduced. Sanctuary policies disrupt this necessary partnership, leaving law enforcement agencies with fewer tools to protect their communities.

The argument often made in favor of sanctuary policies is that they foster trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities. However, this trust does not have to come at the expense of public safety. Refusing to cooperate with federal immigration authorities creates more opportunities for criminal organizations to exploit the system.

The House Oversight Committee's investigation into sanctuary policies is a step in the right direction. By inviting mayors from sanctuary cities to testify and demanding documents related to their sanctuary policies, the committee seeks to hold these leaders accountable for their decisions. These mayors must address the impact of their policies on public safety and provide transparency to the American people.

Chicago, for example, must reexamine its stance. Sanctuary policies may aim to secure a sense of belonging for immigrant communities, but they ultimately fail these communities and the broader public. Policies must prioritize protecting all people from harm, regardless of their immigration status.

The mayors of sanctuary cities must be willing to engage in meaningful dialogue with federal authorities to find pathways toward mutual cooperation. Open communication and collaboration will always be more effective than obstructionism.

The consequences of sanctuary policies extend far beyond the ideological debate surrounding immigration enforcement. These policies directly affect public safety, enabling criminal networks to make communities across the United States more dangerous. At a time when the country faces crises such as the opioid epidemic, we cannot afford to allow sanctuary policies to continue disrupting effective law enforcement operations.

Failure to address these issues is no longer an option. Federal, state and local governments must come together to reform these misguided policies and prioritize the safety of all Americans. Sanctuary cities must start cooperating with ICE to ensure a unified, effective approach to public safety.

The American people deserve leadership that is proactive, responsible and focused on protecting their communities. Anything less is a disservice to every law-abiding citizen and victim of the crimes these policies enable.

*©2025 Chicago Tribune. Distributed by **Tribune Content Agency, LLC**. John Fabbriatore is a visiting fellow with the Heritage Foundation's Border Security and Immigration Center. He spent more than 30 years in federal law enforcement, including 23 years with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, most recently as a member of the Senior Executive Service and the field office director for Colorado and Wyoming.*

---

*Governing's opinion columns reflect the views of their authors and not necessarily those of Governing's editors or management.*