News

Trump threatens to cut federal funding to "sanctuary states," targeting Connecticut



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President Donald Trump announced on Jan. 13 that his administration will no longer provide federal funding to "sanctuary cities or states" in an address to the Detroit Economic Club. According to a press release published by the Justice Department last year, Connecticut was identified as a sanctuary jurisdiction.

"Starting Feb. 1, we're not making any payments to sanctuary cities or states having sanctuary cities, because they do everything possible to protect criminals at the expense of American citizens, and it breeds fraud and crime and all of the other problems that come," Trump said in the address. "So we're not making any payment to anybody that supports sanctuary cities."

On Jan. 20, the Trump administration ordered a federal funding review for 14 states, including Connecticut, according to a memo directed to the Office of Management and Budget.

It is currently unclear the extent to which funding will be cut to the sanctuary states and cities Trump mentioned in his address.

"These cruel threats are part of a series of reprehensible and intentionally intimidating mass deportation tactics that cause real harm to people who live, work, and contribute to our state," said Erick Russell, the Connecticut state treasurer, in a statement obtained by The Daily Campus. "What's more, these threats are insulting: Connecticut residents already send more tax money to Washington, D.C., to prop up the Trump administration's failed policies than we receive in federal support for our residents."

Russell said he is working with the governor and legislative leaders to direct $500 million to the Budget Reserve Fund in case federal funding is delayed in any way.

The Budget Reserve Fund, also known as a Rainy Day Fund, is a common tool used by states to stabilize state revenue in case of any large fluctuation, according to a publication from the Tax Policy Center.

Connecticut typically makes contributions to its Budget Reserve Fund during years when there is surplus revenue that has not been set aside for another purpose, according to a document from the Office of the State Comptroller.

"That same commitment to fiscal preparedness is reflected in the long-term investments we have made as a state—independent of federal support—in programs that strengthen families and expand opportunity," Russell said.

In compliance with Executive Order 14287, the Justice Department was required to publish a list of cities, counties and states across the country that fit their criteria for being a sanctuary jurisdiction in April of last year. The criteria mostly describes jurisdictions that limit cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or extend services to residents regardless of legal status.

Despite lacking a clear legal definition, the term "sanctuary" is generally used to refer to towns or cities that offer certain protections against federal immigration enforcement. Only two towns in Connecticut have officially declared themselves sanctuary cities: Hartford and Windham.

"Sanctuary policies impede law enforcement and put American citizens at risk by design," said U.S. Attorney General Pamela Bondiin a statement published alongside the list. "The Department of Justice will continue bringing litigation against sanctuary jurisdictions and work closely with the Department of Homeland Security to eradicate these harmful policies around the country."

Along with this designation of sanctuary jurisdictions, Bondi sent personal letters to the respective government leaders of the states, counties and cities outlined on the list, including Gov. Ned Lamont.

"You are hereby notified that your jurisdiction has been identified as one that engages in sanctuary policies and practices that thwart federal immigration enforcement to the detriment of the interests of the United States. This ends now," Bondi's letter to Lamont read, according to a story from CT Mirror.

In response, Lamont issued a statement where he said "Connecticut is not a 'sanctuary' state. ...Labeling Connecticut a 'sanctuary' ignores the reality that our approach mirrors that of many other states that have adopted clear rules for cooperation with federal immigration authorities."

The "sanctuary policies" that Bondi mentioned reference Connecticut's Trust Act, which has been the subject of scrutiny by ICE officials in the past.

"Sanctuary legislation like Connecticut's Trust Act only endangers the communities it claims to protect. Such laws only force law enforcement professionals to release criminal alien offenders back into the very communities they have already victimized," said Patricia H. Hyde, ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Boston acting field office director, in a publication on ICE's website.

The Trust Act was initially enacted in 2013 to clarify the relationship between ICE and state and local law enforcement following the implementation of a program called Secure Communities, wherein the fingerprints of criminals obtained by the FBI are shared with DHS to check against ICE's immigration databases. The Trust Act has since been amended and expanded twice, most recently in 2025, since its original enactment.

The act clarifies that local and state law enforcement are not required to arrest, transport or detain people for ICE. It also prevents ICE officials from roaming detention facilities. The act also prohibits law enforcement from detaining people solely based on an administrative warrant or a civil immigration detainer without a judicial warrant.

Despite the limits imposed by the Trust Act on collaboration between ICE and state and local law enforcement, it was deemed compliant with 8 U.S.C. § 1373, a federal law that prohibits the restriction of communication with the Department of Homeland Security about immigration status, according to a letter from the acting Assistant Attorney General Alan Hanson in 2017.

State and local jurisdictions were required to certify their compliance with 8 U.S.C. § 1373 in order to maintain eligibility for grants from the Office of Justice Programs as mandated by a Department of Justice policy implemented in March of 2017.

Grants from the OJP fund law enforcement and safety activities across the country as mentioned in their website. As of Jan. 21, Connecticut has received $193.7 million in funding from OJP grants.

"Connecticut will continue to plan ahead, uphold the rule of law, and protect critical investments so that families are not caught in the middle of political posturing in Washington," Russell said.

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