

# Mayors defend 'sanctuary city' laws

## Four testify to critical House Republicans

**Jonathan Allen**  
REUTERS

Mayors of four of the largest cities in the U.S. appeared before lawmakers in the House on Wednesday to defend their so-called "sanctuary city" laws, which restrict local officials in helping enforce federal immigration regulations.

The Republicans who lead the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee have long criticized such laws, as has President Donald Trump, who returned to the White House in January promising to deport more unauthorized immigrants, including asylum seekers, than his predecessors.

In opening remarks, Committee Chairman James Comer, a Republican from Kentucky, told the mayors of Boston, Chicago, Denver and New York City, all Democrats, that Congress should vote against sending even "a single penny" of federal funding to sanctuary cities.

"These reckless sanctuary policies also force federal immigration officers to go into local communities to apprehend criminal illegal aliens," Comer said. "If sanctuary cities were to simply communicate and work with federal immigration authorities, then federal agents could arrest criminal illegal aliens in a secure environment like a state or local jail."

The mayors defended the laws as making all their residents safer, even as lawmakers on the committee, which is known for its sometimes combative hearings, interrupted some answers that went beyond a "yes" or "no." State and municipal officials have said the U.S. Constitution's 10th Amendment prevents the U.S. government from



**New York City Mayor Eric Adams has said he wants the city's laws weakened to allow cooperation with the federal government's deportation efforts.**

PHOTOS BY KENT NISHIMURA/REUTERS

commandeering local officials to enforce federal law.

All the mayors said they have always and will always honor criminal arrest warrants issued by courts.

The specifics of sanctuary laws vary from city to city, and some have been on the books for decades, but they are generally intended to afford migrants similar due-process rights as those of citizens.

Ranking Member Gerry Connolly, a Democrat from Virginia, said sanctuary city laws are "in full compliance of federal law."

"They do not obstruct ICE from carrying out its duties," Connolly said, referring to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, adding that local police, not federal agents, were in the best position to ensure public safety.

New York Mayor Eric Adams has said he is willing to help with Trump's deportation efforts as he tries to get Trump to dismiss a federal criminal indictment charging him with corruption. Some Republicans questioned Adams, a Democrat, more gently than they did the other mayors, while at least three Democrats asked Adams if, as some federal prosecutors have alleged, the mayor had



**Denver Mayor Mike Johnston told the House panel his city had honored more than 1,200 criminal arrest warrants from ICE in recent years.**

struck an improper agreement with the Trump administration to escape prosecution.

"There's no deal, there's no quid pro quo, and I did nothing wrong," Adams replied to Rep. Robert Garcia, a Democrat from California, who also called on Adams to resign.

Adams, who is running for reelection, has said he wants the city's laws weakened to allow cooperation with the federal government's deportation efforts where a migrant has been only accused, but not convicted, of a serious crime. He also wants to allow federal immigration agents back on Rikers Island, the city's main jail complex. New York City Council members have said they will not weaken the law.

In his remarks to the House, Adams said New York City always complies with local, state and federal law. He said he had no tolerance for criminals, but also that he "must create an atmosphere that allows every law-abiding resident, documented or not, to access vital services without fear of being turned over to federal authorities."

"If an undocumented person refuses to seek medical care until they have a medical emergency, our city's health

care system will be strained, and if an undocumented individual witnesses a crime but is afraid to call 911 for fear of being turned over to federal authorities, criminals will roam free," Adams said.

### 'Ruled by fear'

His fellow mayors relayed similar concerns about migrant children and parents being afraid of going to schools, police stations, churches or clinics, including migrants who had acquired legal permanent residency or U.S. citizenship but feared being profiled because of their accent or skin color.

"A land ruled by fear is not the land of the free," Boston Mayor Michelle Wu told the lawmakers, at times translating her remarks into Spanish and other languages.

In most cases, sanctuary laws forbid local officials from arresting or detaining a person the federal government suspects of violating its immigration laws unless a judge has issued an arrest warrant.

Even in sanctuary cities, ICE officials are free to arrest people they have cause to believe are living in the U.S. without authorization, typically a civil, not criminal, violation.

ICE has a major field office in Manhattan, and its officers arrest hundreds of migrants across New York City each year under both Republican and Democratic presidents.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security can deport noncitizens once an immigration judge issues a final order of removal.

The main point of contention has been over how cities handle what ICE calls detainer requests for the minority of migrants who end up in local custody. ICE officials routinely ask local prison, jail or police officials to continue to detain a migrant who was free to leave custody for up to 48 additional hours.