

Allow Local Law Enforcement to Prioritize Keeping the Peace, Building Trust, and Conserving Resources

Some local governments in Minnesota have separation ordinances or policies that prohibit the collection of immigration status when not legally required and that prohibit the use of local law enforcement resources in actions carried out solely to detect, arrest, or detain a person based on their immigration status. Law enforcement agencies developed these policies to carefully balance important policing priorities: cooperating with federal immigration authorities where required, conserving state resources to spend on state needs rather than federal programs, and ensuring that everyone living in our communities trusts that they can turn to the police if they are the victims of crime.

Though these policies are sometimes called “sanctuary” policies, these governments are not offering sanctuary from immigration law – residents can still be arrested, detained, and deported by federal law enforcement agents, and local government will participate when legally required to do so. **Separation policies are instead about ensuring public safety, the wise stewardship of public resources, and community cohesion.**

The Advocates for Human Rights is the largest provider in the Upper Midwest of free legal help for people fleeing persecution, torture and trafficking. Our clients include individuals, families, children, and people held in ICE custody. We also provide technical assistance to law enforcement and political leaders on anti-human trafficking efforts. We see firsthand the positive impact of these policies and the negative consequences for individuals, communities, and public safety when the line between federal immigration enforcement and local government gets blurred.

TRUST

Safe communities depend on effective state and local public safety and government agencies. Effective public safety requires trust-building. When migrant communities fear immigration consequences for interacting with government agencies, they are less likely to report crime, serve as witnesses, or appear in court. States and local public safety agencies in Minnesota have invested in building trust with dedicated outreach to immigrant communities, investing funds to respond to community needs, and creating clear distinctions between themselves and federal immigration enforcement. Demanding state and public involvement in federal immigration enforcement undermines that investment and trust, which makes us all less safe.

In Minnesota, state and local agencies dedicate resources to combating human trafficking, resulting in investigations of and convictions for trafficking, wage theft and exploitation against abusive employers, sex traffickers, and others. These difficult cases hinge on victim cooperation. Traffickers know that fear of deportation is a powerful weapon to silence their victims. When abusive employers threatened immigration consequences, policies that guaranteed protection against retaliation resulted in the first felony charges of wage theft by the MN Attorney General's Office and the first successful labor trafficking conviction by Hennepin County. The Advocates saw the importance of these policies through our work with these victims and agencies. These successes were possible largely due to the ability of law enforcement to get scared noncitizen witnesses to cooperate and the ability to dedicate local resources to complex cases instead of federal enforcement work.

RESOURCES

Separation ordinances allow state and local governments to invest limited resources in public safety priorities for their communities. Demanding diversion of state or local law enforcement resources to screen for immigration status, and to house, hold, report, or arrest individuals for the federal government means they can no longer be used for investigations and prosecutions of crimes that are most harmful to the community.

Misdirecting local resources into immigration enforcement also risks even greater costs. In past cases, as part of their cooperation with immigration enforcement, local law enforcement used racially-targeted traffic stops and arrests, or detained people even after charges were dismissed or sentences served. When local law enforcement arrest and detain people for immigration violations without a criminal charge, they risk lawsuits for violating Constitutional rights prohibiting unlawful searches and arbitrary arrest. Those lawsuits can cost local governments significant money beyond the diversion of public safety resources.

Contrary to political rhetoric, using resources toward immigration enforcement does not increase public safety. Migrant communities are not more likely to commit crimes, so using state and local resources to target public safety criminal priorities while leaving federal civil immigration enforcement to federal authorities is the proven best use of limited resources.

Minnesota has invested resources and law enforcement capacity to prioritize human trafficking investigations and prosecutions. Even with this investment, the need outstrips availability. As a result, agents and prosecutors have to make difficult decisions about what cases to pursue, how many resources to direct to them, and how to support victims in the process. In a recent case, The Advocates identified a trafficking victim, but the state agency faced challenges in rapid investigation because they did not have adequate resources to send an investigator to the area.

As federal resources are redirected to immigration enforcement, we have heard from Minnesota law enforcement agencies that they have needed to take over abandoned federal trafficking investigations, putting even more strain on local resources.

TRAFFICKING

Traffickers and abusive individuals use fear of public officials, especially immigration and police, to force victims to remain in harmful situations. If local law enforcement is required to assist federal immigration enforcement, this will support the claims of the abusers that their foreign national victims will not be able to get help, and that if they try to seek safety, they will be deported.

The Advocates has served hundreds of trafficked individuals over the past seven years and has seen how traffickers wield threats of immigration enforcement against their victims. In one case, an abusive employer threatened not to renew visas for nearly 100 farmworkers, using that threat to keep them in houses with inadequate heat, as well as forcing them to work without clean water or bathroom breaks and refusing to let them leave the property unaccompanied. In other cases, individuals have brought domestic workers to the US only to force them to work constantly, subjecting them to physical harms and psychological abuse, but the individuals fear reporting because the traffickers threaten deportation and harms to their families in home country.

Making it more difficult to report trafficking harms our most vulnerable community members and undermines Minnesota's effort to combat exploitation. The Advocates works on cases where children were forced to work in factories, agriculture and street vending by predatory traffickers who refused to let them attend immigration court hearings. Because the child was unable to defend themselves, the court issued an order for removal. The trafficker then used that order to threaten the child further. If local resources are directed to federal immigration enforcement, these children will be less safe.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Thriving societies, like those that MN has worked to create, require that people feel safe participating in daily life. Bringing your kids to school, attending court hearings, calling the police in emergencies, going to work, seeking healthcare, or participating in religious activities should never involve a risk of not returning to family. Communities do not want to live with the ever-present monitoring of public spaces by federal law enforcement. Even when people do not fear immigration consequences, the constant presence of immigration enforcement chills participation in the community.

One county court in Minnesota noted how harmful expanded immigration enforcement is to the operation of the court: “This affects our core judicial function. If a defendant or victim has immigration concerns, that person is less likely to appear if federal agents are waiting at the courthouse to round people up.”

TAKE ACTION



Support the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act of 2025.

- This bill codifies a policy that keeps our schools, public safety agencies, healthcare facilities, and faith locations free from interference by immigration authorities.
- The Trump Administration, in rescinding this long-standing policy, has further undermined community safety and inclusion.



Defeat the No Bailout for Sanctuary Cities Act.

- This bill empowers the federal government to force states and localities to use their limited resources for federal immigration priorities.
- The bill undermines the will of voters at the state and local level.
- The bill's exception to protect victim and witness safety depends on the victim or witness proactively coming forward, a requirement that would exclude almost every trafficking client that The Advocates has encountered.



Oppose appropriations that would allow the Executive to coerce states to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement through threats of withheld funding, or that would prioritize immigration enforcement over public safety, basic needs, and economic growth.