

# California's sanctuary state bill could endanger lives and cripple budgets

By Andrea Seastrand

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A bill making its way through the state Legislature would turn California into a sanctuary state, limiting local law enforcement from cooperating with federal immigration officials. Although it would be a boon to those who have entered the country illegally, [Senate Bill 54](#) is likely to make Californians less safe and could result in a loss of federal funding in reprisal for violating federal immigration law.

The bill's author is California Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de León, D-Los Angeles, who recently told a legislative committee that half of his family members are undocumented immigrants, most of whom have obtained false identification, such as Social Security or green cards, and who are liable for deportation.

De León argued that his bill will keep undocumented families intact, help the state economy and make California safer.

Currently, local law enforcement agencies are required to maintain custody of criminal immigrants for up to 48 hours if a detainer is issued by immigration authorities or the Department of Homeland Security. Local agencies also must provide information on the immigration status of criminal suspects.

But those requirements aren't followed by many sanctuary cities, such as San Francisco, which ignored a detainer request to hold [Juan Francisco Lopez-Sanchez](#), an illegal immigrant from Mexico with seven felony convictions who had been deported five times. Eleven weeks after Lopez-Sanchez was released, he shot Kathryn Steinle in the back as she strolled with her father along San Francisco's Embarcadero.

A majority of Californians oppose sanctuary cities, according to a UC Berkeley poll.

Her last words were, "Help me, dad!" as she collapsed in her father's arms and died two hours later in a hospital.

There are about 1.9 million deportable criminal immigrants in the country, according to the Center for Immigration Studies. That figure does not include more than 940,000 who have been ordered removed but are still here, and an unknown number who, like Lopez-Sanchez, were kicked out of the country but returned. [Here on the Central Coast](#), we had our own tragedy with the sexual assault and murder of Marilyn Pharis of Santa Maria in 2015.

Senate Bill 54 would prohibit local law enforcement agencies from sharing property, equipment, databases and manpower with immigration enforcement officials. It also would forbid local sheriffs from transferring criminals, such as Lopez-Sanchez, to federal authority without a warrant. And they would no longer be required to notify immigration officials when they have an illegal immigrant in custody for a drug-related crime. That would include criminals such as Lopez-Sanchez, whose long rap sheet includes heroin possession and narcotics manufacturing.

California law enforcement officials are worried these restrictions will tie their hands.

“We are concerned that SB 54 limits communication and cooperation with our law enforcement partners,” said Cory Salzillo, representing [the California State Sheriffs’ Association](#). “We have a need and desire to work together with law enforcement at all levels of government to keep our communities safe.”

In addition to making Californians less safe, Senate Bill 54 could also be a major blow to the state treasury if President Donald Trump follows through on his [pledge to limit federal funds to sanctuary cities](#).

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State government expects to receive \$105 billion in federal funding in the next fiscal year, which amounts to 58 percent of the total state budget or 86 percent of the General Fund budget. No one knows how much might be withheld, but even de León acknowledges it “would hurt our senior citizens, children, farmers and veterans.”

Nearly three-quarters of Californians believe local authorities should not be able to ignore a federal request to hold a detained person who is in the country illegally, according to a 2015 [UC Berkeley poll](#). The opposition includes 65 percent of Latino respondents.

So why does this legislation matter to us here in San Luis Obispo County? In addition to endangering public safety, it has the potential to cripple our local and state budgets with the loss of federal funding.

Californians should oppose and state lawmakers should vote down this ill-conceived legislation that will endanger lives and decimate state resources for our neediest citizens.