



Sanctuary cities bill will harm Texas beyond measure

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Texas's Senate Bill 4 is making headlines this week, as it was just passed by both House and Senate and is heading to Gov. Abbott's desk this week. The bill, notorious for being the "toughest sanctuary city bill in the country," has been met with fierce opposition by law enforcement and private citizens alike. It's so disliked that a reported 24 people were arrested at the Capitol on Monday, as they disrupted the peace and blocked entrances while singing and chanting in protest.

SB 4 essentially forces police officers and other officials to comply with any and all federal orders to detain illegal immigrants. If they refuse to comply, and treat a given jurisdiction as a sanctuary city or area, they can now face jail time and fines, with punishments escalating in severity if they repeat offenses. As it currently stands, law enforcement officers have some degree of discretion over what happens to those they detain. Under this law, which will take effect in September, the police will have terrifyingly-wide discretion to ask for documentation of legal status, even during routine traffic stops.

Over a six year period from 2011 to early 2017, Texas law enforcement has arrested more than 212,000 criminal aliens and charged them with 566,000 crimes, mentioned Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick in press reports. These statistics are fundamentally misleading and make immigrant-committed crime sound far worse than it is: There's a world of difference between charging someone with a crime and convicting them of it. In fact, irresponsible use of statistics like these paints a different picture of crime in America, and makes it seem as though immigrants are a far larger threat to public order than they actually are. The Cato Institute reminded us recently that illegal immigrants are less likely to commit crime than native-born Americans, so our fears are unfounded. Many researchers even go so far as to argue that crime drops in neighborhoods as the immigrant population grows.

Crime data aside, giving this wide discretion to police officers would instill abounding fear in immigrant communities. One could be apprehended at almost any time, under only suspicion of wrongdoing. Imagine if you felt watched at every step, or if basic daily activities like driving suddenly took on much more legal weight.

By signing SB 4 into law, Abbott would be giving into fear mongering and ignoring actual statistics. He would be opening the state up to numerous lawsuits and eroding citizen faith in the state's legislative system, as the bill's constitutional issues would certainly be brought to light. Worst of all, he would be betraying the many immigrants — both legal and illegal — who contribute to Texas's economy and culture on a daily basis.

Few publications have noted that this comes on the coattails of a police brutality case near Dallas, where a 15-year-old black boy was shot and killed by an officer while attempting to leave a party. The last thing Texas police need right now is more antagonism between them and communities of color. Giving the police such expansive deportation power is an obvious step in the wrong direction, in light of recent events. This will only hurt Texas and the families that call our state home.