

# COLORADO NEWSLINE

## Colorado sheriff suggests migrant arrivals lead to ‘increase in crime’—then clarifies

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Douglas County Sheriff Darren Weekly recently suggested that migrants moving south from Denver into the county are to blame for increased crime, though his remarks appear unsupported by evidence.

He made the comments in an email endorsement paid for by Republican Colorado Senate candidate and current House Rep. Lisa Frizell of Castle Rock.

“Colorado is in the middle of a border crisis with over 30,000 migrants shipped to Denver alone,” Weekly wrote on Feb. 28. “More and more, we are seeing these individuals find their way south to Douglas County. There has been an increase in crime since this influx of illegal immigration, and unfortunately, the Democrats have done nothing to curb crime.”

When asked to provide a timeline for when the crime increase began and for corroborating data, Weekly stated in an email, “I must clarify that my statement endorsing State Senate candidate Lisa Frizell referenced the statewide impact the current migrant crisis is having on crime.”

“Since this influx began, I have been in touch with law enforcement leaders throughout the metro area and have heard story after story about how crime has increased in various jurisdictions,” Weekly said.

Frizell did not respond to a request for comment by the time of publication.

According to Denver’s overall crime dashboard, which regularly updates National Incident-Based Reporting System data, crime is down in [Denver](#) from 2022 to 2023.

Crime statistics reported for Douglas County and published by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation show violent crime, property crime, burglary and fraud increased in 2023 from 2022 but remained lower than in 2021. DUI and drug-related arrests were at levels similar to those in 2020 and 2021, and motor vehicle thefts were down from the prior year.

But Weekly said, “In 2023, our organization had a violent ransom kidnapping in Highlands Ranch that involved Venezuelan migrants who were being housed in the city of Denver. Our patrol personnel are coming into contact with undocumented migrants on traffic contacts.”

Weekly is referring to the arrest of two men who forced a 25-year-old man out of his car and into a minivan on April 28, 2023, at the RTD Park-n-Ride at South University Boulevard and Dad Clark Drive. According to a Douglas County Sheriff’s Office [press release](#), the victim knew his

kidnappers and was said to owe them a debt. There's no mention of the assailants' immigration status.

### **'Sanctuary city' resolution**

Douglas County Commissioner Lora Thomas said during a phone interview that she's not aware of any circumstances involving an increase of migrants in the county.

Last October, county Commissioners George Teal and Abe Laydon signed a resolution affirming the county would not become a "sanctuary city." They called on Denver and surrounding cities and counties to do the same. Thomas refused to vote for the resolution, but she opposed it because she thought telling other cities what they should do was inappropriate, she said.

Weekly, a Republican, said his office would "conduct a thorough analysis of the information, which will take place over the next several months and years."

About 40,000 people have arrived in Denver since the end of 2022, fleeing poor economic conditions and political turmoil in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and other countries in South America.

Frizell, who announced her candidacy for Colorado Senate in November, is serving her first term as House Representative for District 45, which includes Castle Rock. She chairs the Joint Legislative Audit Committee. Her other committee assignments include Business Affairs and Labor; Finance; Appropriations; and Transportation, Housing and Local Government.

Her announcement to run for Senate District 2, which includes Castle Rock and portions of Parker, came after incumbent Sen. Jim Smallwood, a Parker Republican, chose not to file for reelection. Frizell previously served as Douglas County's elected assessor.

### **Trump stokes fears**

A recent Pew Research Center report found that while 57% of Americans say the large number of migrants entering the country leads to more crime, there are stark differences across party lines. The poll found that 85% of Republicans link more migrants with increased crime, while only 31% of Democrats feel the same.

Former President Donald Trump has stoked fears about migrants committing crimes in recent political speeches. In a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference on March 2, he described the country under President Joe Biden as awash in "bloodshed, chaos, and violent crime."

Yet, the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan law and policy institute, found many of the claims in his speech unfounded.

"Since Biden took office, violent crime appears to be on a downward trend," the center said in a fact-check of Trump's speech. "As of 2022, violent crime rates had fallen by 4 percent and murder rates by roughly 7 percent since 2020, according to the FBI. Those numbers haven't returned us to pre-Covid levels, unfortunately, but the trend lines certainly don't suggest that Biden's policies — or anyone's policies since 2020 — caused a crime surge."

Researchers have also found little evidence to support this view. A 2018 study published in the journal *Criminology* reviewed the effect of unauthorized immigration on violent crime between 1990 and 2014 and found that undocumented immigration was generally associated with less violent crime.

The authors noted limitations to their study. It's possible, for example, that fewer crimes committed by undocumented immigrants are reported to police.

The Cato Institute states, "The vast majority of research finds that immigrants do not increase local crime rates and that they are less likely to cause crime and less likely to be incarcerated than their native-born peers."