

## ‘Sanctuary city’ policies draw fire from Statehouse bill

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A bill before the N.H. House would prohibit the adoption of so-called “sanctuary” policies on immigration enforcement and, in effect, override resolutions on the books in three Monadnock Region communities.

Sponsored by 11 Republicans, [House Bill 232](#) — called the Anti-Sanctuary Act — would require local and state police to comply with federal requests to detain undocumented immigrants.

It would also bar municipal policies that prohibit police officers from asking about a person’s immigration status, and any other actions by a state or local government “to prohibit, limit, or in any way restrict or discourage the enforcement of federal immigration law.”

While there’s no one definition of a “sanctuary city,” it generally refers to a jurisdiction that in some way limits its cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

The anti-sanctuary bill is unlikely to pass the Democrat-controlled Legislature. But it touches on an issue that has surfaced multiple times in Cheshire County in the past two years, in the sheriff’s race, town-meeting votes and a Keene City Council resolution calling on city employees to limit their cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to the minimum required by law.

Similar debates over immigration enforcement have occurred across New Hampshire and the U.S.

Critics of sanctuary policies, including President Donald Trump, say they undermine public safety by shielding those who are in the country illegally. Supporters of such policies say they make communities safer, because unauthorized immigrants are less fearful of reporting crimes.

“If you turn a stoppage of someone with a taillight out into a car chase, you’re making life more dangerous,” said Andrew Maneval, a former selectman who drafted Harrisville’s “sanctuary town” resolution. “If you’re discouraging witnesses from coming forward about actual criminals, you’re making the town less safe.”

Two co-sponsors reached by The Sentinel said the bill is about preventing crime and following the law.

“When they enter the country illegally, they jump the line in front of people who spend many years to do it the right way,” said N.H. Rep. Jess Edwards, R-Auburn, a co-sponsor.

Edwards also spoke about ICE detainers — requests that a local or state agency hold an undocumented immigrant who would otherwise be released for up to 48 hours, so federal agents

can take that person into custody. The bill would force New Hampshire police departments to comply with detainers.

“My main concern is if they’ve detained somebody who is here illegally, particularly if they have an ICE detainer,” Edwards said, “... we have a duty to protect the people of New Hampshire and to process those criminal illegal immigrants properly over to federal authority.”

Another co-sponsor, N.H. Rep. John Burt, R-Goffstown, said he has heard or seen in the news that “there are a lot of illegals here that are committing heinous crimes on our people. And this would be one step to hopefully slow that process down in New Hampshire.

“You know, there’s law enforcement being killed, there’s women being raped by some of these individuals that come through our porous border,” he continued.

He clarified that he was speaking about the United States generally, though “New Hampshire is not exempt.” Asked to name specific incidents in the state, he cited “drug running.”

Studies have found that immigrants commit crimes at lower rates than native-born Americans, according to the fact-checking website PolitiFact. A 2018 analysis by the libertarian Cato Institute, for instance, looked at crime in Texas in 2015. It found that there were 1,797 criminal convictions of native-born citizens per 100,000, 899 convictions of undocumented immigrants per 100,000 and 611 convictions of legal immigrants per 100,000.

The bill’s primary sponsor, Rep. Jeanine Notter, R-Merrimack, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

N.H. Rep. Joe Schapiro, a Keene Democrat who advocated for the city’s immigration resolution in November 2017, called the anti-sanctuary bill “mean-spirited” and contrary to Granite State values.

“It’s very much against local control, and it is just unwelcoming,” he said. “The general premise of the bill is that immigrants are dangerous, violent people who we need to be protected from, and I don’t think that represents the thinking of citizens in New Hampshire.”

Several Monadnock Region residents testified against the bill at a hearing in Concord last week, including Susan Hay, a founding member of the Keene Immigrant and Refugee Partnership, and Maneval, the former Harrisville selectman.

New Hampshire’s chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union also opposed the bill, arguing it would undermine local discretion, foster racial profiling, damage public safety and community trust and expose municipalities to liability because they would be detaining people outside the judicial process.

The bill is backed by the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a Washington, D.C.-based group that favors reducing legal and illegal immigration. Shari Rendall, the group’s state and local engagement director, testified in support of the bill at last week’s hearing. She was not available for an interview Wednesday. But the N.H. Union Leader quoted her as saying that sanctuary measures “place a greater emphasis on the welfare of illegal aliens than the welfare of citizens and legal residents of the community.”

Dublin, Harrisville and Cheshire County are on the organization’s nationwide list of jurisdictions with sanctuary policies, though Keene is not.

In March 2017, voters in Harrisville and Dublin passed nonbinding resolutions related to immigration and law enforcement. Three other area communities, Peterborough, Fitzwilliam and Hancock, rejected similar measures that same year.

The Harrisville resolution said town police officers should not ask people about their immigration status or share information about people with ICE, “except in cases involving allegations against such a person of violent criminal activity or of a violation of NH State felony laws.”

Dublin’s states that town police should not act based on an individual’s race, national origin, religion, language or immigration status, “unless such personal characteristics have been included in timely, relevant, credible information from a reliable source, linking a specific individual to a particular criminal event.”

The Dublin resident who presented the article, Grace Aldrich, specifically said that she and the other residents behind it were not asking to become a “sanctuary city,” according to the town meeting minutes, though much of the debate centered on just that.

The same month, Cheshire County Sheriff Eliezer “Eli” Rivera announced his office would not ask people for their immigration status, comply with detention requests from ICE or help the agency enforce immigration laws, unless related to public safety. That policy later factored into Rivera’s 2018 campaign for re-election when it became an issue in the race. Rivera won handily.

In November 2017, the Keene City Council approved a recommendation that city staff not ask about immigration status, assist in immigration enforcement or detain people on behalf of ICE unless required by federal, state or local law.

It’s unclear what practical effect the anti-sanctuary bill would have on the Monadnock Region. On Wednesday, police chiefs in several area towns said they rarely, if ever, have received detainees from ICE.

“Never in my memory have we received such a request,” said William Oswalt, who has been Jaffrey’s police chief for a little more than 10 years. Winchester Police Chief Mike Tollett, who was recently promoted to the position, said he’s been at the department for six years and was not aware of any detainees in that time. Peterborough Police Chief Scott Guinard said the last detainee request his department handled was in the “early ’90s, maybe, possibly even before that.”