



## Anaheim Refuses to Wade Into Federal Immigration Fight

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The Anaheim City Council refused to condemn the U.S. Department Homeland Security's change in immigration rules expanding the federal government's ability to deny permanent residency status to immigrants receiving public benefits.

"I have some concerns about the proposed public charge rule. You know, we are a nation of immigrants. I am one of them. I came to this country 45 years ago legally as an immigrant. I openly question whether this is a sound policy. But I do not believe this rises to a level for us to take action on," Mayor Harry Sidhu said.

Sidhu, who is from India, said although he's proud to be Anaheim's first immigrant mayor in "modern times and its first mayor of color," he would abstain from voting on the resolution.

The Council voted 3-2-2 at Tuesday's meeting, with Councilmembers Lucille Kring and Trevor O'Neil dissenting and Councilman Stephen Faessel abstaining with Sidhu.

Councilmembers Denise Barnes, Jordan Brandman and Jose Moreno voted yes on the resolution condemning the rule change.

"Anytime the government begins to speak about its immigrant communities, proposes policies, it raises a lot of alarms and concerns about what the role of the city is in that," Moreno said.

A little over half of Anaheim's roughly 350,000 residents are Latino, according to the U.S Census Bureau's 2017 estimate.

And nearly 37 percent of residents are foreign born, according to the estimate. Of that, 45 percent of residents are naturalized citizens and just under 55 percent are classified as "foreign born; not a U.S. citizen." The estimates do not specify immigration status.

Moreno brought the item forward after scheduling it with support from Barnes and Brandman at the Aug. 13 meeting. Moreno immigrated to the US with his family from Mexico when he was four years old on the visa program and was naturalized, along with his family, under President Ronald Reagan's 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act.

He said during Los Amigos meetings he attends, a Latino advocacy group, people said they have been too scared by the rule change to use vital public programs.

"We are consistently getting more and more folks who are coming saying that attorneys are telling them to not allow their kids to be involved in ... Medi-Cal or school lunch programs. Because you just never know where the next rule will come from," Moreno said.

He continued, “So out of an abundance of caution, they’re concerned about involving themselves in any part of public life. And I think that’s just not a way for us to support ourselves as fellow human beings.”

It’s also one of the rare instances the Council majority, consisting of Sidhu, Kring, Faessel and O’Neil didn’t agree with each other.

“I’m going to not be supporting this for a number of reasons. This iteration dates back to the (President Bill) Clinton administration. I know many people have a problem with (President Donald) Trump ... but he (Clinton) started this, it goes back a long way,” Kring.

She also said when her grandparents immigrated to the US, “You had to have a sponsor. You had to have a job. You had to have someone who was willing to support you financially because the government wasn’t going to do it.”

Kring also said the city shouldn’t weigh-in on federal policy.

O’Neil said the resolution was a distraction from city issues.

“I don’t support this item for a couple of reasons. First of all, I agree with you, this is not really something that’s in our direct purview and a distraction from the items that are important to the residents and us running the city. And second, I don’t support the item because I support the rule change,” O’Neil said.

O’Neil concluded, “Our country’s already faced with a trillion dollar deficit and if the availability of public benefits creates an incentive for immigration, we’ll only be adding to that.”

His comments drew the ire of Moreno.

“Mr. O’Neil I would like to invite you to a community meeting on a Wednesday so you can learn whether residents are interested in this kind of topic or not in the city. For you to summarily state this has no interest in our residents, I think unfortunately shows the narrow exposure you have to our city,” Moreno said.

Moreno invited O’Neil to join him at a Los Amigos community meeting.

“So I invite you as a colleague, a councilmember from District 6, to come down from the hills and come to a meeting with me at a coffee shop and you’ll hear residents talking about this,” Moreno said.

O’Neil did not respond to Moreno’s comments.

Brandman reminded his colleagues that the Council has weighed in on federal immigration efforts in 2013.

“I also want to remind our colleagues of the precedent we have established on this dais in wading into an issue just like this,” Brandman said.

The federal immigration rule, which takes effect Oct. 15, known as the “public charge” rule, expands the definition of public benefits immigrants take, including housing and food stamps, which could be used to deny their application for permanent residency.

According to the rule's executive summary on the [Office of the Federal Register's website](#), the current immigration rules, which were modified in 1999, "has been interpreted to mean a person who is 'primarily dependent on the Government for subsistence, as demonstrated by either the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance or institutionalization for long-term care at Government expense.'"

The new rule "defines the term 'public benefit' to include cash benefits for income maintenance, SNAP, most forms of Medicaid, Section 8 Housing Assistance under the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance, and certain other forms of subsidized housing."

The rule doesn't apply to refugees, immigrants under 21 years old receiving healthcare or bar immigrant parents of U.S. citizens if their children receive public benefits.

"In fact, based on this formula, Andrew Carnegie would have been denied residence," Barnes said.

She also said it could affect Anaheim's resort industry.

"What impact could this have on our local economy? Anaheim service-sector tourist economy depends heavily on the notorious low wages often [paid to] immigrants working their way to a better future as Americans in waiting. This rule change by the Trump administration punishes those people who offer the fuel of human energy for the economic engine of the tourist economy," Barnes said.

Moreno also cited an [analysis from the Conservative think tank, The Cato Institute, which was written by the institute's immigration policy analyst David Bier](#).

"[Department of Homeland Security] claims that the rule will promote self-sufficiency among immigrants, but the goal is a farce. The rule is designed to exclude immigrants regardless of the degree to which they are supporting themselves and contributing positively to the economy," Bier wrote.

Bier voiced his concerns to the department that an immigrant family of four making 250 percent above the [federal poverty line](#) — a little over \$64,000 — and receiving \$2.50 per person, per day in public benefits would be disqualified.

He claimed the department made the rule tougher after he filed his complaint during the comment period.

"This means that the government adjudicator could predict that an immigrant will be 99 percent self-sufficient and still ban them. This rule has almost no connection whatsoever to requiring immigrants to support themselves. It is entirely about banning legal immigrants who this administration sees as a threat—socially and economically," Bier wrote.

During the meeting, Faessel said he doesn't agree with the immigration rule change, but abstained from voting on the issue because of the politically charged environment surrounding it.

"This is a difficult issue for me, not because of where I stand on the underlying issues, surprisingly to some, but because of the hyper-charged politics around it," Faessel said. "I am

pro-immigration. I've studied Anaheim history, certainly, and immigration has helped, certainly, to make Anaheim great and immigration has helped to make this country great.

He later said, "I think we need to bring the temperature down locally, in our community, on immigration and not join the national food fight. Because that's what it's turned out to be."