

Ohio GOP pushes to defund 'sanctuary cities,' law enforcement agencies that don't aid ICE

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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Lawmakers are clashing over immigration and whether to defund Ohio's "sanctuary cities."

Republicans have introduced legislation to take away local government funds and homeland security dollars from local governments and police forces that ignore requests from Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

They say [House Bill 26](#) enforces the rule of law and ensures everyone plays by the rules. Democrats say the bill fuels fear and discrimination while tearing apart communities.

For those that don't cooperate with ICE, the bill would cut 10% of a local government funds and give it to Ohio State Highway Patrol for enforcement.

"You're going to block us from getting illegal immigrants in your cities," said state Rep. Josh Williams, a Toledo-area Republican. "We're going to get them when they drive between those cities."

Under HB 26, law enforcement agencies that don't work with ICE when asked also wouldn't be eligible for Homeland Security grants they use for training, equipment and personnel. And the Ohio attorney general's office could investigate whether local agencies cooperate with federal official.

Democrats say local governments aren't responsible for enforcing federal immigration law, and [cities like Columbus](#) and Cleveland shouldn't have to spend their tax dollars helping ICE.

"We don't think it should be a forced decision with the threat of funding being withheld," said state Rep. Ismail Mohamed, a Columbus Democrat, though he acknowledged some cities and law enforcement already work with ICE.

The bigger issues for Mohamed, who came to the U.S. from Somalia, is how conversations about GOP bills and President Donald Trump's executive orders impact immigrant communities.

"Puerto Ricans around Ohio are being detained because they look like an immigrant," said Alicia Pagan, state director for the [League of Latin American Citizens of Ohio](#). "My family carries their birth certificates so if they get detained, we can show them our birth certificates."

Williams told Cleveland.com that legal immigrants and naturalized citizens shouldn't worry. The Ohio GOP isn't targeting them with legislation, he said.

"I believe those fears are unfounded. What do you have to worry about," Williams said. "If you're legal and you're not engaged in criminal conduct, you shouldn't be scared of anything."

However, organizations like Our Helpers, a central Ohio nonprofit that aids immigrants and refugees, report legal immigrants being afraid to go to the grocery store or send their children to school.

"The families that we served are absolutely being profiled," Our Helpers CEO Dorothy Hassan said. "We do have civilian neighbors who are being emboldened and have this new dark space to target the families that sound different and look different."

As for House Bill 26, Williams hopes to get a hearing by the end of February or early March. He sees passing it as fulfilling a campaign promise.

"We had both a president and a senator campaign on strict immigration enforcement," Williams said. "That indicates to us that voters supported those policy positions. That becomes an election mandate to carry out what we promised."