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Massachusetts Sanctuary Cities Sue To Stop Trump From Entangling Them In Federal Immigration Enforcement

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BOSTON—Two sanctuary cities in Massachusetts—**Chelsea** and **Somerville**—filed a federal lawsuit today challenging the Trump Administration’s efforts to coerce them into participating in mass deportation efforts. Represented by **Lawyers for Civil Rights**, the Cities assert that the Administration’s heavy-handed tactics—threatening to strip sanctuary cities of federal funding and prosecute them for failing to bend to the President’s will—violate their Constitutional rights.

Somerville and Chelsea have identified as sanctuary/welcoming cities since 1987 and 2007, respectively, recognizing that victims and witnesses are less likely to report crimes if they know that local police are working in concert with federal immigration authorities. By avoiding that entanglement, sanctuary cities improve public safety and quality of life not just for immigrant residents, but for all residents and community members.

But since his inauguration, Trump has issued Executive Orders ([here](#) and [here](#)) threatening to cut off federal funds to sanctuary cities unwilling to use municipal resources to carry out federal responsibilities; the Department of Justice (DOJ) has [warned](#) of criminal and civil prosecutions against them while freezing all DOJ funding; and the Department of Transportation (DOT) has said it will [de-prioritize](#) transportation funding to sanctuary cities.

“The President cannot use federal funding as a weapon to force local governments to undermine public safety and their values and participate in his mass deportation efforts,” said **Oren Sellstrom, Litigation Director of Lawyers for Civil Rights**, one of the Cities’ attorneys. “Today’s lawsuit seeks to protect sanctuary and welcoming cities, so they can continue to make public safety decisions that are in the best interests of their residents.”

"Public safety is the top priority for the City of Chelsea—we cannot afford to have our residents fear reporting crimes or engaging with local law enforcement, as this undermines the safety of everyone in our community," said **Chelsea City Manager Fidel Maltez**. "The City of Chelsea has been firmly committed to being a Sanctuary City since 2007. We are stronger because of our immigrant population, and we will not let fear or misinformation divide us. Chelsea is a city for all, and that will never change."

“Bullying sanctuary cities is not just an assault on immigrants or cities—it’s an assault on all of us, on state and local rights, on the economy, and the Constitution. So, Somerville is standing up for what is both lawful and right,” said **Somerville Mayor Katjana Ballantyne**. “Our residents know that our community is safer when police focus on preventing crime and leave federal immigration enforcement to the Feds. We know that stripping localities of their right to lawful local policies, erodes everyone’s rights. And we know politicized withholding of federal funding threatens the health and safety of all residents be it your neighbor who relies on Meals on Wheels for dinner or your kids who need road investments for a safer walk to school. We urge the Administration to honor our Constitution and let us serve our communities as we know is best. This isn’t something you should have to fight for in court—but that is what we are stepping up to do.”

“Somerville has proudly upheld our identity as a sanctuary city for nearly four decades, reaffirming our commitment in 2016 and 2019, and again just this year. The federal government’s attempts to coerce us into betraying our immigrant neighbors are unconstitutional, morally unacceptable and a danger to our full community,” said **Judy Pineda Neufeld, Somerville City Council President**. “Our city’s values are clear: We will protect the dignity, safety, and rights of all of our residents, regardless of immigration status.”

"In Chelsea, it's critical we build and maintain trust between our community and law enforcement," said **Norieliz DeJesus, Chelsea City Council President**. "Our residents should not have to fear that reaching out for help from local police will put their families at risk of immigration enforcement. This lawsuit aims to protect our right to focus on keeping our community safe."

Chelsea received approximately \$14.5M in federal funding for fiscal year 2024, including for education and a downtown reconstruction project. During that same fiscal year, Somerville received approximately \$19.4M in federal funds to support a variety of community and public safety services, including roadway safety initiatives, homeless prevention services, and efforts to address and reduce youth tobacco usage and alcohol consumption.

The lawsuit asks a federal court to hold that the Executive Orders, as well as the DOJ and DOT directives, are unconstitutional and to enjoin them from being enforced.

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