

Senator John Cornyn

Statement on Sanctuary City Policies and the Release of Criminal Aliens

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this important hearing to honor the memory of crime victims.

I appreciate the brave testimony we have heard today and am glad that this Committee has given a voice to the families of victims—who are too often forced to suffer in silence. As elected representatives, it is our responsibility to help keep dangerous criminals off the streets. Because Congress has plenary power over our nation’s immigration laws, we have a special duty to ensure that these laws are enforced in a manner that protects public safety.

“Sanctuary city” and “catch-and release” policies are an affront to the constitutional authority of Congress and our important work to safeguard American communities. I believe in zero tolerance for dangerous criminal aliens who are apprehended by law enforcement. If you violate our laws, enter the country illegally, and proceed to commit a criminal offense, you should be swiftly apprehended, detained, and removed from the United States.

Unfortunately, the Obama Administration and sanctuary cities across the country have undermined the enforcement of our immigration laws against criminal aliens. Since President Obama took office, at least 195,000 illegal immigrants who committed serious crimes have been released from federal custody without being removed from the United States. This is the numerical equivalent of releasing 94% of the current federal prison population. These are not “petty” offenders but include thousands of individuals convicted of the following types of crime: homicide, sexual assault, kidnapping, aggravated assault, domestic violence, and drug trafficking. It is unacceptable for the Obama Administration to release so many dangerous criminal aliens back into our communities. I hope that we get some straight answers and explanations out of them today.

But it is also unconscionable for state and local officials to ignore lawful requests from the Department of Homeland Security to detain criminal aliens so that they can be removed from the United States. And under “sanctuary city” policies across the United States, this is exactly what happens—government officials refuse to cooperate with federal immigration law enforcement, putting dangerous offenders back on the streets. In Fiscal Year 2014 alone, sanctuary city policies allowed

approximately 12,000 of these criminal aliens go free without being removed from the United States as required by law. These policies hurt our security, decrease public safety, and undermine the public's trust in government. But, most importantly, "sanctuary city" and "catch-and-release" policies turn law-abiding citizens into victims. When we refuse to enforce the laws against criminals, families and communities pay the price. The testimony we have heard today demonstrates this sad fact.

The vast majority of immigrants in the United States are law-abiding individuals seeking a better life and their chance at the American Dream. These immigrants enrich our culture and strengthen what it means to be an American. This hearing is not about those individuals. But criminals, whether immigrants or non-immigrants, should be punished as the law requires. "Sanctuary city" and "catch-and-release" policies are disrespectful to the sacrifices of the millions of law-abiding immigrants in our country today. And these policies recklessly gamble with the safety of every single American community.

I hope that this hearing and the testimony of these victims' families will send a clear message that we should no longer tolerate the release of dangerous criminals who entered our country illegally. I once again thank the Chairman for holding this hearing, and thank the families for their strength and courage.