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TRUMP ADMINISTRATION RAMPS UP DISPUTE WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS OVER SANCTUARY POLICIES

Justice Department issues letters to more than two dozen authorities saying immigration directives may violate federal law

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LOS ANGELES – The Trump administration is expanding its **immigration dispute** with local officials across the country, warning 29 additional city, county and state governments that they may be violating a law requiring them to share certain immigration information with federal authorities.

The notice, issued in **letters to local officials** from Vermont to Oregon this week, tells governments that they must comply with the information-sharing rule to receive a federal grant, and says they have until Dec. 8 to prove compliance.

The warning comes despite **repeated rulings** from federal courts that so far prohibit the Trump administration from pulling funding over local immigration directives. Known as sanctuary policies, the directives vary from place to place, but generally protect undocumented immigrants from federal enforcement.

The **Trump administration** has been **battling local governments** over the issue for months, pushing cities and states to alert federal officials to illegal immigrants in local jails before they are released.

Some of the cities and states on the list say they already share that information with federal officials, but have other policies in place that benefit and protect undocumented immigrants.

Acting Assistant U.S. Attorney General Alan Hanson said in letters dated Wednesday that each local government entity has until Dec. 8 to show it is in compliance with an immigration-related information sharing law that the government says is required to keep getting certain federal grant money.

“Jurisdictions that adopt so-called ‘sanctuary policies’ also adopt the view that the protection of criminal aliens is more important than the protection of law-abiding citizens and the rule of law,” Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement announcing the latest round of letters.

The letters are aimed at jurisdictions that the government says received Justice Department-administered funds under the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant program for the 2016 budget year. The letters don’t specify what action the administration could take if the jurisdictions don’t comply, but Trump administration officials have previously said the government could demand repayment of past grant money. Mr. Hanson also directs the jurisdictions to advise if they would adhere to federal law if they are approved for grants in the future.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement this year briefly published weekly reports naming law enforcement agencies it said weren't complying with requests to jail certain immigrants suspected of being in the country illegally. That list was widely criticized after multiple errors were discovered and the agency hasn't released a new list in several months.

In January Mr. Trump signed an executive order directing the Justice Department to deny some federal grant money to jurisdictions that didn't cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

A group of nine jurisdictions, including the **state of California**, were notified in the spring that they could be in jeopardy of losing millions of dollars grant program.

Mr. Trump's executive order and ensuing warnings prompted litigation and complaints from targeted jurisdictions. At least three federal judges around the country have temporarily blocked all or part of the executive order. A federal judge in Philadelphia on Wednesday blocked the administration from denying grant money to that city based on compliance with the communication law cited in Mr. Hanson's letter.

California has repeatedly come under fire from the Trump administration and some local law enforcement for its policies that dictate when local law-enforcement officials can cooperate with immigration authorities. Gov. Jerry Brown in October signed **SB 54**, which is expected to take effect in January.

The law limits cooperation between local law-enforcement officials and federal immigration authorities, but doesn't entirely block communication or cooperation with federal agents. The Trump administration has criticized the law, saying it would put the public at risk by barring immigration authorities from being able to arrest suspected criminal immigrants while they are still in state or local custody.

Officials from several jurisdictions that received the latest letter denied violating any federal law.

The local government of Santa Clara County, Calif., which is among those suing the administration over the funding threat, said in a statement the letter's assertions about compliance are wrong and politically motivated.

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors President Dave Cortese said his county didn't get any grant money and never agreed to abide by conditions of the grant program. The county has sued to block Mr. Trump's executive order.

"Apparently, the federal government can't keep track of who received taxpayer money," Mr. Cortese said in a statement. "We demand that the federal government immediately rescind its erroneous letter."

In the Justice Department letter to the state of Illinois, Mr. Hanson, the acting assistant U.S. attorney, pointed to the state's recently passed Trust Act, which limits cooperation between local police and federal authorities by barring law enforcement from complying with federal requests to keep some immigrants suspected of being in the country illegally in jail.

John Maki, executive director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, the state agency in charge of administering and receiving public safety grants, said the state's Trust Act was written "explicitly to not conflict with federal law."

Alex Comisar, a spokesman for Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, also denied that his city, which received a letter from the Trump administration, is violating federal law.

Mr. Comisar said Los Angeles “has the right to create sensible policies to keep its neighborhoods safe while protecting the rights and dignity of our immigrant communities.”