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U.S. Attorney General Halts DOJ Funding to Sanctuary Cities, Raising Concerns for the U.S. Virgin Islands

U.S. DOJ-administered grants for law enforcement and public safety are now suspended for non-compliant jurisdictions, putting over \$6.6 million in USVI federal funding at risk as the territory continues its non-cooperative stance against ICE enforcement.

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U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi.

Newly sworn-in U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi has issued directives to the Department of Justice to pause all DOJ-administered federal funding to sanctuary cities, marking a major shift in policy. The move is part of a broader strategy to enforce immigration laws more strictly, targeting jurisdictions that refuse to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) efforts.

Bondi, who was confirmed by the Senate late Tuesday and sworn in on Wednesday, made this [one of her first official actions](#) in office. Her directive specifically targets sanctuary cities, which are local jurisdictions that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement. This includes major urban centers such as Los Angeles, New York City, and Chicago, known for policies that restrict federal detainers on undocumented immigrants.

Funding Cuts Limited to DOJ Grants

Bondi's directive does not impact all federal funding but instead applies only to grants administered by the DOJ. This includes law enforcement-related grants, public safety initiatives, and programs supporting crime prevention efforts.

"For years, sanctuary cities have defied federal law, putting American lives at risk," Bondi stated. She has instructed the DOJ to halt grant funding to these cities and pursue legal actions against local and state officials who obstruct ICE deportation efforts. This could potentially lead to criminal prosecutions of mayors, governors, and law enforcement officials for non-compliance.

In addition to city governments, Bondi's orders extend to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that provide services to undocumented immigrants. The DOJ will now review all existing funding agreements with these organizations to ensure compliance with federal immigration laws. This scrutiny could result in the withdrawal of DOJ-administered federal grants previously allocated to NGOs for housing, legal aid, and migrant transportation services.

The U.S. Virgin Islands, which has taken a [non-cooperative stance](#) toward ICE enforcement, could face similar repercussions under this policy. In October 2023, the DOJ awarded over \$6.6 million to the U.S. Virgin Islands for various public safety and justice program. Additionally, the territory has received support through the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program, which serves as a primary source of federal criminal justice funding for the Virgin Islands and other jurisdictions.

If the USVI is deemed non-compliant with federal immigration laws, it risks losing access to these critical DOJ-administered grants, which could impact funding for law enforcement training, crime prevention programs, and other justice-related services.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has repeatedly emphasized that immigration enforcement falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government and that local officials should not be involved. His directive clearly states that all government-managed spaces, including schools, must be safe zones for all residents, regardless of immigration status.

Mr. Bryan's directive provides specific instructions for schools and law enforcement in the territory:

- Schools cannot permit ICE agents to enter school buildings unless they present a warrant signed by a judicial officer. Administrative warrants alone are not sufficient.
- ICE agents are prohibited from speaking with students without parental consent. School personnel must not disclose immigration-related information without a judicial order or subpoena.
- Any ICE presence on or near school grounds must be reported to superiors. The Commissioner of Education must immediately notify the Attorney General of any ICE activity.
- Local law enforcement officers are instructed not to aid ICE agents in immigration enforcement. Instead, they are directed to focus on protecting residents and enforcing

territorial laws.

"As Virgin Islanders, we celebrate our community's diversity, and we will continue to protect the rights of all our residents," Governor Bryan stated in the directive.

During a Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting on Wednesday, Assistant Commissioner of Education Victor Somme III [discussed the impact](#) of evolving federal immigration policies on the territory's public education system, particularly in light of Governor Bryan non-cooperation directive. He highlighted the formation of a task force and the creation of a guidance policy to ensure that all children, regardless of immigration status, continue to receive a free and appropriate public education, stating that "education is a right and not a privilege."

Bondi's directive comes at a time of heightened immigration enforcement under the Trump administration, which has already deployed over 1,500 troops to the southern border and has carried out over 8,000 ICE arrests nationwide as part of a crackdown on undocumented migrants.

The suspension of DOJ grants and potential legal actions against local officials set the stage for a contentious debate over federal versus state and local authority in immigration enforcement. Governor Bryan's non-cooperative posture aligns with similar policies in Democratic-run states and cities, which have historically opposed Trump administration efforts to deputize local law enforcement in federal immigration actions.

Bondi's directive to halt federal funding for sanctuary cities is likely to face legal scrutiny. Precedents like the court rulings during the Trump administration's first term, where similar attempts to withhold funding were challenged, suggest that sanctuary cities might contest this directive in court. Critics argue that such measures could infringe on states' rights or violate the Spending Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which stipulates that Congress must set clear conditions for grants. Legal experts will be watching to see if the courts uphold or strike down this policy, potentially defining the scope of federal power over local jurisdictions in immigration enforcement.