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California sues over Trump policy tying transportation grants to immigration



An electric freight truck enters the Hight Logistics truckyard in Long Beach on Jan. 15. (William Liang / For The Times)

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- California Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta said a Trump administration policy that would withhold billions of dollars from the state is

‘blatantly illegal.’

- Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said California and 19 other states suing the administration are “breaking federal law and putting the needs of illegal aliens above their own citizens.”

WASHINGTON — California Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta [filed two lawsuits](#) on Tuesday challenging a Trump administration policy that would deny the state billions of dollars in transportation grants unless it follows the administration’s lead on immigration enforcement.

“This is our money, and the money of other states, that he’s holding hostage for his own unlawful gain,” Bonta said in a call with reporters.

“President Trump can’t use these funds as his bargaining chip,” he added.

The lawsuits, filed with a coalition of 20 states against the Departments of Transportation and Homeland Security in U.S. district court in Rhode Island, argue that imposing the new set of conditions across a broad range of grant programs exceeds the administration’s legal authority.

“More cars, planes, and trains will crash, and more people will die as a result, if Defendants cut off federal funding to Plaintiff States,” the lawsuit against the Department of Transportation states.

‘This is a blatantly illegal attempt to bully states into enacting Trump’s inhumane and illogical immigration agenda.’

— California Atty. Gen. Rob Bonta

Assistant DHS Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said cities and states that prevent agents from arresting immigrants should not receive federal funding.

“Radical sanctuary politicians need to put the safety of the American people first — not criminal illegal aliens,” she said in a statement. “The Trump administration is committed to restoring the rule of law. No lawsuit, not this one or any other, is going to stop us from doing that.”

Department of Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said in a statement that the immigration enforcement requirement is a common-sense step that reflects the priorities of the American people. Duffy said he simply took action to ensure compliance with federal law.

“These 20 states are challenging the terms of their grant agreements because their officials want to continue breaking federal law and putting the needs of illegal aliens above their own citizens,” Duffy said. “Under the leadership of President Trump, what my Department has done is remind grant recipients that by accepting federal funds, they are required to adhere to federal laws.”

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Last month, Trump [signed an executive order](#) aiming to identify and possibly cut off federal funds to so-called sanctuary cities and states, which limit collaboration between local law enforcement and immigration authorities.

“It’s quite simple,” said White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt in a briefing announcing the executive order. “Obey the law, respect the law, and don’t obstruct federal immigration officials and law enforcement officials when they are simply trying to remove public safety threats from our nation’s communities.”

Cities and states that find themselves on the Trump administration’s list could also face criminal and civil rights lawsuits, as well as charges for violating the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act.

During Trump’s first term in 2018, California legislators passed a pioneering sanctuary law, the [California Values Act](#).

During a news conference announcing the lawsuits on Tuesday, Bonta said California has now sued the Trump administration 22 times.



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California receives more than \$15.7 billion in transportation grants annually to maintain roads, highways, railways, airways and bridges, Bonta’s office said. That includes \$2 billion for transit systems, including buses, commuter rail, trolleys and ferries.

The state also receives \$20.6 billion in yearly homeland security grants to prepare for and respond to terrorist attacks and other catastrophes. Those funds include emergency preparedness and cybersecurity grants.

But the coalition of states — also including Illinois, New Jersey and Rhode Island — argued that because such grant funding has no connection to immigration enforcement, the Trump administration cannot impose criteria that forces states to comply with its

vision of enforcement. And they said the policy ignores Congress' authority to designate federal funding.

"The president doesn't have the authority to coerce state and local governments into using their resources for immigration enforcement," Bonta said.

The other states also stand to lose billions of dollars in federal funds. Illinois, for example, received more than \$122 million in funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and \$2 billion from the Department of Transportation, said Illinois Atty. Gen. Kwame Raoul.

New Jersey Atty. Gen. Matthew Platkin said the Trump administration's politics are making his state less safe and damaging the trust between local police and immigrant communities. In one case, he said, immigration agents tried to deport a victim of domestic violence [who was stabbed in the neck](#).

Platkin also noted that Duffy, the transportation secretary, announced he will [reduce the number of flights](#) in and out of Newark Liberty International Airport because of equipment failures.

"His solution, apparently, is to cut billions of funding from transportation to our state unless we agree to assist in deporting victims of domestic violence," Platkin said in the press call. "And if we don't, which is our right under the 10th Amendment, they will continue to destroy one of the busiest airports in the world."

During his first term, Trump withheld millions of dollars in public safety grants from local law enforcement, prompting California leaders [to sue](#). But the question of whether the federal government can withhold grants to punish sanctuary jurisdictions was left unanswered by the Supreme Court after President Biden took office and previous lawsuits were dismissed.

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