

July 23, 2015

Dear Member of Congress:

We write to express our commitment to work with Congress on measures to prevent crime and violence, but we are concerned that the Enforce the Law for Sanctuary Cities Act, or H.R. 3009, will reduce already limited resources to protect the public. Our efforts to stop violence in American cities must be strengthened, not weakened.

The bill seeks to encourage so-called “sanctuary cities” to fully enforce federal immigration law by penalizing Byrne JAG, COPS and SCAAP funding. In so doing, Congress would be taking away the very funding law enforcement agencies use to prevent and suppress crime and keep our citizens safe.

Byrne JAG is the cornerstone federal crime-fighting program, supporting the federal government’s crucial role in spurring innovation, as well as testing and replicating evidence-based practices nationwide. Byrne JAG supports state and local law enforcement agencies in nearly every jurisdiction in this country, including operations, crime prevention strategies and best practices in policing. States and localities use Byrne JAG to test emerging and evidence-based approaches to the public safety challenges in their jurisdictions. We know first-hand the enormous impact Byrne JAG-funded programs have in improving the functioning of the criminal justice system across our nation.

The COPS Hiring program has been instrumental in the adoption of community policing strategies in law enforcement agencies across the nation – strategies that are key to building and maintaining trust between the police and the communities they serve, particularly minority and immigrant communities. It has helped to reduce crime rates and make our communities safer. Withdrawing COPS grants from sanctuary cities would have the unintended consequence of weakening community policing efforts and, thereby, reducing public safety.

It should be noted that states already are subject to substantial Byrne JAG penalties under the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA), the NICS Improvements Amendments Act of 2007, and the Deaths in Custody Act. Because the program is broad in scope, Byrne JAG is a tempting target for new penalties for noncompliance with other, unrelated federal mandates. However, when Byrne JAG funds are withheld in penalty, worthy crime-fighting programs are withdrawn from the field.

Penalizing the federal justice assistance programs will only impede the ability of law enforcement to prevent and fight crime. Therefore, we respectfully urge you to consider alternatives that express the disapproval of Congress, without the threat of further reductions in funding for law enforcement and criminal justice.

Sincerely,

National Conference of State Legislatures  
US Conference of Mayors  
Major Cities Chiefs Association  
Major County Sheriffs’ Association  
National Criminal Justice Association