

Attorney general: Sanctuary cities are risking federal money

Portland, Seattle among cities on the West Coast

By SADIE GURMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Monday warned so-called sanctuary cities they could lose federal money for refusing to cooperate with immigration authorities and suggested the government would come after grants that have already been awarded if they don't comply.

Sessions said the Justice Department would require cities seeking some of \$4.1 billion available in grant money to verify that they are in compliance with a section of federal law that allows information sharing with immigration officials.

His statements in the White House briefing room brought to mind tough talk from President Donald Trump's campaign and came just three days after the administration's crushing health care defeat. But Sessions also acknowledged he was reiterating a similar policy adopted by the Obama administration last year.

"I urge the nation's states and cities to carefully consider the harm they are doing to their citizens by refusing to enforce our immigration laws," Sessions said.

The message is a furtherance of Trump's campaign promise to "defund" sanctuary cities by taking away their federal funding. But legal precedent suggests that would be difficult.

The Obama administration issued the same warning last year, telling cities they risked losing grant money in 2017 if they didn't comply with the law.

Sessions did not detail what specific factors would trigger the government to deny or strip a city of money, only that



AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

Attorney General Jeff Sessions pauses while speaking to members of the media during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, D.C., Monday.

it would take "all lawful steps to claw-back" funds already awarded to cities deemed to be out of compliance.

Portland and Seattle are among the sanctuary cities on the West Coast.

"All of this is happening in an environment that contains a lot of heated rhetoric but not a lot of facts," Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler said in a statement. "For example, just last week an Oregon Republican Party spokesman said that Portland's status as a sanctuary city means we are harboring 'criminal illegal aliens who are murdering and raping.' This statement is inaccurate and harmful."

Wheeler said Portland received just over \$3 million in Department of Justice grants in the city's 2015-16 budget, and questioned whether Sessions has the legal ability to withhold grant funds from states over the issue.

Wheeler said his administration spoke with Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Department of Justice Monday about concerns over the "tremendous damage they are doing to the social, civic, and economic life of our city. The City of Portland, our police bureau, and our employ-

ees do not cooperate with ICE. However, ICE has the power to operate within our city, and does not have to inform us of their activities."

Array of programs

At stake are grants that go toward an array of programs, including victim services, body cameras for police, tools to cut rape kit testing backlogs and police involvement in community events.

In fiscal year 2016, the Office of Justice Programs made nearly 3,000 grants totaling \$3.9 billion to cities, counties, states and other local governments.

Philadelphia, which has designated itself as a "sanctuary city," received \$57.5 million in Justice Department grants in fiscal year 2016 — mostly to cover police expenses for the Democratic National Convention, which was held in the city.

Although there is no official definition of what makes a locality a "sanctuary," the Trump administration has begun to publish weekly reports of local jurisdictions that aren't cooperating with federal efforts to find and deport immigrants in the country illegally, as part of exec-

utive order Trump signed in January.

The White House last week listed more than 200 cases of immigrants released from custody before federal agents could intervene. Sessions on Monday pointed to two cases in which immigrants who had been released by local law enforcement went on to commit violent crimes.

Refusing to honor such immigration detainee requests would not put a city in violation of the statute Sessions cited, which deals instead with law enforcement sharing of information about someone's immigration status.

Defy any crackdown

Meanwhile, municipal leaders nationwide vowed to defy any crackdown.

"We are going to become this administration's worst nightmare," said New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, who was among officials gathered in New York for a small conference that attracted officials from cities including San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York.

Mark-Viverito and others promised to block federal immigration agents from accessing certain private areas on city property, to restrict their access to schools and school records and to offer legal services to immigrants in the country illegally.

California Senate leader Kevin de León called Sessions' message, "nothing short of blackmail. ... Their gun-to-the-head method to force resistant cities and counties to participate in Trump's inhumane and counterproductive mass-deportation is unconstitutional and will fail."

Associated Press writers Meghan Hoyer in Washington, Steve Peoples in New York and Gene Johnson in Seattle contributed to this report.

Sentence: 'It was a little bit of good news for us in law enforcement'

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Moreover, Needham argued his client only had 20 grams of methamphetamine, and the case might not have reached federal court except for the death of the police officer.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon reminded Needham that drug cases are treated differently when they include violence and felons in possession of a firearm.

"I appreciate that you were not the one that caused the death of the heroic law-enforcement officer — not directly — but your possession of a firearm did lead to the death of Sgt. Goodding," Simon told the defendant.

Jones was born in Las Vegas and has an extensive criminal record in Nevada, including convictions for grand larceny auto, possession of a stolen vehicle, possession of a firearm by a felon, attempted possession of stolen property and escape.

After spending most of his adult life in prison, he moved to the Oregon Coast to get a fresh start. Jones said he found a job and was turning his life around before relapsing into his drug habit.

"As soon as I sprinkled meth onto my dream, it became a nightmare," he said.

Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham and other local law enforcement officials went to Portland for the sentencing. "It was a little bit of good news for us in law enforcement," Ham told the Seaside City Council Monday night.

U.S. Attorney Billy J. Williams thanked the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and local law enforcement for their work on the investigation.

"The tragic and senseless death of Sgt. Goodding underscores the

very real danger law enforcement officers face every day while faithfully serving their communities," Williams said in a statement. "We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Sgt. Goodding for his service and his loved ones for their incredible sacrifice. It is maddening to know that criminals involved in drug trafficking and the illegal possession of firearms continue to present a danger to our communities."

R.J. Marx of The Daily Astorian contributed to this report.



Sgt. Jason Goodding

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