

San Antonio Express-News

County wants governor to say 'no' Local officials ask Abbott to veto sanctuary city bill

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May 6, 2017



John Davenport/SA Express-News

Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar speaks out against Senate Bill 4 on Friday in front of the Bexar County Courthouse. Salazar and other public leaders, including San Antonio Police Chief William McManus, County Judge Nelson Wolff and state Sen. Jose Menendez were on hand to voice their disapproval of the bill.

San Antonio officials called on Gov. Greg Abbott on Friday to put down his signing pen and veto Senate Bill 4, the so-called "sanctuary cities" bill that passed the Legislature this week and is on its way to the governor's desk.

SB 4 would give law enforcement officers the authority to ask people they have detained about their immigration status, and subject their bosses to misdemeanor charges and potential jail time if they don't comply with federal agency requests to hold individuals who might be deportable.



State Sen. José Menéndez says he will write to Gov. Greg Abbott asking him to reconsider his support for the SB 4 based on both his heart and his legal mind. Menendez said the bill doesn't do what it intends to do and could erode the trust of local law enforcement. John Davenport / San Antonio Express-News

Abbott listed this issue as one of his top priorities this session. His office didn't return requests for comment Friday.

Standing outside the Bexar County courthouse, county commissioners, San Antonio City Council members, local legislators and top brass at the San Antonio Police Department and the Bexar County Sheriff's Office repeated the same message: the bill won't improve safety or reduce violent crime, they said, and could lessen trust between police and immigrant communities and lead to potential racial profiling.

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County Judge Nelson Wolff

State Sen. José Menéndez, D-San Antonio, said he will write to Abbott asking him to reconsider his support for the bill based on both his heart and his legal mind. Menéndez said the bill doesn't do what it intends to do, and instead could "erode the trust" of local law enforcement.

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff said the bill's requirements would increase costs to the county and divert law enforcement efforts from addressing violent crime to enforcing federal law.

"What's going to happen?" he asked, predicting no officer would ask someone like him, "an Anglo guy" in a "nice two-piece suit," for his papers but instead would direct questions about immigration status to "the person with brown skin."

Wolff released a letter he sent Abbott requesting a meeting to discuss SB 4. Wolff said requiring the county to detain undocumented immigrants would be "fiscally unsustainable" and put a financial burden on local taxpayers.

"The Department of Justice has neglected to reimburse Bexar County \$22.3 million for complying with federal detainer requests since FY 2004-2005. This is a \$22.3 million subsidy from local taxpayers to the federal government," he wrote.

Bexar County Sheriff Javier Salazar said U.S. citizens make up the majority of the 4,000-plus inmates housed in the Bexar County Jail at any given time as well as the more than 27,000 people in the county with active warrants. frahman@express-news.net