

# Lawmakers seek to bar ICE raids at sensitive locations

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Lawmakers and religious groups are speaking out in support of a bill that would largely protect immigrants from Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids within 1,000 feet of “sensitive locations” such as hospitals, schools and churches.

Rep. Jesús G. Garcia, D-Ill., reintroduced the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act on Feb. 8, along with 13 Democratic co-sponsors, including Reps. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, Janice Schakowsky of Illinois and Jasmine Crockett of Texas.

The bill would bar immigration enforcement actions at or near churches and an array of other locations—such as organizations that assist children or pregnant women, rape crisis centers, sites of funerals, weddings or other “public religious ceremonies,” Social Security offices and polling places—except “under exigent circumstances.”



“No one—no child in the classroom, no mother in a hospital, no family at a place of worship—should live in fear that an immigration raid should shatter their lives in the very spaces meant to protect them,” Garcia said Feb. 13, when he discussed the bill on the House floor.

Garcia went on to note in addition to immigrants skipping appointments out of fear of being detained by ICE officers, “churches are turning to virtual worship services so that they will not put their parish at risk.”

“We cannot become a government that normalizes cruelty,” Garcia said.

## **‘A threat to public safety’**

A companion bill also was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and 23 Democratic and Independent co-sponsors, including Sens. Raphael Warnock of Georgia, Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, Cory Booker of New Jersey and Bernie Sanders of Vermont.

“Allowing ICE to invade spaces where people access health care, education, justice and prayer is cruel and unnecessary, as well as a threat to public safety,” Blumenthal said.

“When people are too frightened to seek medical care or report a crime, the entire community suffers. The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act establishes fundamental safeguards for our immigrant neighbors who have lived here for decades, worked hard, raised families and enriched our communities.”

Among the 580 organizations endorsing the bills are several religious groups, such as the Union for Reform Judaism, United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society, United Church of Christ, Sikh Coalition, Unitarian Universalist Association, the Catholic social justice lobby network and the justice team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

The Catholic Health Association also endorsed the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act in a letter addressed to lawmakers earlier this month.

“We affirm that every human life is sacred and possesses inalienable worth, and that health care is essential to promoting and protecting the inherent dignity of every individual,” read the letter from Sr. Mary Haddad, president and CEO of CHA. “When access to health care is impeded, our mission to provide care is also.”



Atlanta church in January to arrest an immigrant before ultimately arresting him after he stepped outside.

The next day, a cadre of Quaker groups—and, later, [the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship](#) and Sikh Temple Sacramento—filed a lawsuit in federal court accusing the Trump administration of violating the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the right of religious people to freedom of assembly.

On Feb. 11, a separate group of 27 religious denominations and organizations [filed a lawsuit](#) making similar claims against the government.

The enthusiasm around the issue may push the legislation forward, as it languished in committee when it was last introduced in 2023.

The bill's chances of passing either chamber, where Republicans currently hold majorities, are unclear. When Migrant Insider asked 17 Senators last month whether churches should be considered sanctuaries from immigration agents, only one Republican, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, expressed support for the idea.

Sen. Ted Budd of North Carolina demurred, calling it a “very interesting question,” and Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana reflected on some of the history of the topic before asking the reporter to catch him on a different day.

Neither Budd nor Cassidy responded to questions from Religion News Service about whether they support the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act or barring ICE from raiding churches in general.