

Taos County 'sanctuary' still in the works, no vote scheduled

By **Cody Hooks**, chooks@taosnews.com

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Taos County commissioners have not yet debated or voted on a proposed "sanctuary" resolution that would add largely symbolic protections to local undocumented immigrants.

More than 100 Taos County residents took to the commission chambers Feb. 7 to demand elected officials institute a policy that would expand the county's role as a place of refuge for immigrants.

Leandro Cordova, Taos County manager, told *The Taos News* the topic will come before the commission for a debate and vote, but that the county administration is "waiting to see what's going on with the other [local governments with sanctuary policies] and what the penalties are."

The Trump administration put out an executive order in January that seeks to punish local governments that are places of sanctuary — namely through funding. And because Taos County gets a substantial amount of money from the federal government, county leadership has been hesitant to pass a resolution that could compromise that funding.

"My big thing is that I can't lose the money," Cordova said, citing the senior program as well as certain law enforcement and emergency operations that are heavily, if not mostly, dependent on federal funds.

The financial impact "is the true unknown nobody seems to be able to answer," Cordova said.

However, Peggy Nelson, a retired Taos judge who authored the draft sanctuary resolution, told *The Taos News* March 7 while "our officials are understandably concerned that they fulfill their fiscal responsibilities," she doesn't think the county "should be overly concerned about the threats coming from Washington."

San Francisco has launched a legal challenge to Trump's funding order and "everyone is watching that case closely," Nelson said.

She added that the lion's share of the federal dollars Taos County receives — payment in lieu of taxes, or PILT — is allocated based on a federal statute and that an "attempt to pick on sanctuary places [via PILT] ... would be violating the regulations."

Furthermore, any attempt by Congress to simply not fund PILT in its entirety would likely "cause an uprising and rebellion in Western states and counties," Nelson said.

Taos County already has one policy in place, passed in 2014, that says staff at the Taos County Adult Detention Center won't ask about inmates' immigration status, nor will they report undocumented

detainees to the federal government. However, that policy puts the responsibility of notifying Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) about undocumented detainees on the district attorney.

Taos County Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn told *The Taos News* he favors “protecting our undocumented friends and neighbors from deportation through a resolution which discourages contact with ICE, but I do not favor protecting undocumented felons.”

“The most effective thing we could do we’ve already done,” said Taos County Commissioner Jim Fambro. “What we have in place in the jail is in the best interests [of undocumented immigrants] and protects the person who has been here living and working and maybe forgot to pay a traffic ticket — the people who did nothing wrong.”

Mark Gallegos, Gabe Romero and Candyce O’Donnell, also Taos County commissioners, did not respond to questions regarding sanctuary from *The Taos News*.

While Nelson thinks the 2014 jail policy and Taos County Sheriff Jerry Hogrefe’s “verbal direction and protocols to his officers” conform with the notion of sanctuary, there is still value both practical and symbolic in passing a resolution that re-ups on that commitment.

“Local governments can actively help dampen fears by letting immigrants know we stand with them,” Nelson said. “Whether [sanctuary] or ‘immigrant friendly’ or ‘welcoming’ is used, the idea is the same — tamp down fears, let people know they can come out of the shadows and report crime, receive services and the like.”

Nelson added, “I do believe there is symbolic and moral value in standing with other communities in saying we won’t be pushed around by burgeoning authoritarianism and fearmongering.”

Cordova told *The Taos News* that a discussion and vote on a sanctuary resolution could be scheduled as early as the first meeting in April (two months after the initial outpouring of support), though it could be later. “It will be on there. ... We are not forever kicking the can on this,” he said.



An event was held March 4 where undocumented workers could have free legal help to complete power of attorney forms for their children in case of deportation. These children were waiting while their parents completed the forms. Megan Bowers Avina