

August 13, 2024



## **Chicago's Brandon Johnson Tops Ranking of America's Ten Worst Sanctuary Mayors**

*IRLI report calls out mayors bringing crime, overcrowding and death to cities*

The rankings for IRLI's 2024 list of America's Worst Sanctuary Mayors and supporting information for each community are as follows:

- 1. Brandon Johnson, Chicago, IL**
- 2. Eric Adams, New York City, NY**
- 3. Michael Johnston, Denver, CO**
- 4. Kelly Girtz, Athens, GA**
- 5. Muriel Bowser, Washington, DC**
- 6. Karen Bass, Los Angeles, CA**
- 7. Mary-Ann Baldwin, Raleigh, NC**
- 8. Reed Gusciora, Trenton, NJ**
- 9. Ron Nirenberg, San Antonio, TX**
- 10. Darrell Steinberg, Sacramento, CA**

---

### ***1. Brandon Johnson, Chicago, IL***

Chicago has earned its reputation as a haven for lawlessness, and that is especially true when it comes to immigration. The current mayor of the Windy City has picked right up from where Lori Lightfoot, his radical anti-borders predecessor, left off.

During his campaign last year, Johnson [came out](#) in support of allowing foreign nationals to vote in local elections. One of the first executive orders Johnson signed after taking office last year was one [re-affirming](#) Chicago's status as a "welcoming and sanctuary" city for illegal aliens, while establishing a new deputy mayor's office to support illegal aliens.

Much like other sanctuary city mayors, Johnson's welcoming attitude has had its limits as the city struggles to fund its lawless policies. After the city became swamped with illegal aliens, the mayor lashed out at Texas Governor Greg Abbott, referring to his [decision](#) to bus illegal aliens to Chicago as "wicked."

Johnson has been steadfast in his refusal to accept responsibility for the chaos in his city. When the recent July 4<sup>th</sup> holiday weekend resulted in 109 city residents shot and 19 killed, Johnson was grilled by local media and [blamed](#) former President Richard Nixon, who died in 1994 and left the presidency in 1974.

Despite his attacks on Abbott, Johnson has continued full steam ahead with his sanctuary policies. Johnson is set to [spend hundreds](#) of millions of dollars in taxpayer money caring for illegal aliens even as many of his own citizens languish in poverty. Johnson even attempted to build an illegal alien shelter on the South Side of the city that would have housed 900 illegal aliens even as tens of thousands of Chicago residents [remain](#) homeless.

As a result of Johnson's sanctuary permissiveness, the overflow of illegal aliens have been [housed](#) in tents cities, homeless shelters and even on the floors of police stations and O'Hare airport.

Johnson's anti-border policies have received pushback from Chicago residents and city council meetings on the subject [have faced protests](#) from angry citizens wondering why their needs are being ignored in favor of illegal aliens. Unfortunately for these residents, Johnson doesn't work for them. He works for anti-borders interest groups. This makes Johnson America's worst sanctuary mayor.

## **2. Eric Adams, New York City, NY**

Two years ago, IRLI ranked New York City as America's most dangerous sanctuary city, and despite his law enforcement background, Adams' policies have only accelerated the Big Apple's rot.

Just months before taking office in 2021, Adams proudly boasted that New York City [would remain](#) a sanctuary city under his leadership, but soon discovered his rhetoric was unsustainable. After Texas Governor Greg Abbott began bussing illegal aliens to New York, Adams began lashing out.

He [accused](#) the governor of racism, [sued](#) the charter bus companies who transported these aliens, and began [begging](#) the federal government for handouts to cover the costs of his city's anti-border policies, [which have](#) totaled in the billions of dollars.

Later, Adams [said](#) the continued arrival of illegal aliens threatened to destroy New York City.

"Never in my life have I had a problem that I did not see an ending to. I don't see an ending to this," the mayor said at the time.

If only there were something Adams could do, such as reversing the backwards anti-border policies which have wrecked the nation's biggest city. While he recently [joined](#) a group of moderate city council members calling for a rollback of the city's sanctuary policies, a commission announced that no referendums on the issue will be put before voters in the next election. For Adams, it is far too little, far too late.

### ***3. Michael Johnston, Denver, CO***

Illegal immigration has ransacked Denver in recent years, and has been aided every step of the way by its virtue-signaling mayor, Michael Johnston.

As is the case with many other sanctuaries, mass illegal immigration has drained opportunities and resources away from the city's residents. Under Johnson's leadership, Denver [has placed hundreds](#) of illegal aliens into a job training program and fast-tracked work permits for them, taking away job opportunities from Americans.

Earlier this year, the city [announced](#) nearly \$46 million in budget cuts after more than 40,000 illegal aliens arrived in the city over the span of 16 months. The city has [stripped](#) funding from its police and firefighter services in order to handle the influx of illegal aliens. Denver has also [reduced](#) budgets for DMV and Parks and Recreation, among other services.

Despite the turmoil wrought on the city by illegal immigration, Johnston has stuck by his sanctuary policies, and attempted to rally his citizens around the idea of a "shared sacrifice," as if the city is at war rather than in [brazen violation](#) of federal immigration law. The mayor has blamed Congress

for budget cuts even as the cuts result from the city flagrantly violating immigration laws that Congress has duly passed.

#### **4. Kelly Girtz, Athens, GA**

While Athens, Georgia, is not officially a sanctuary city, its anti-border policies have made it one in practice.

Kelly Girtz rose to national infamy after his policies played a role in the brutal slaughter of a young student at the University of Georgia. Laken Riley, 22, [was allegedly murdered](#) by a Venezuelan gang member who was in the country illegally and had been protected by Girtz's sanctuary policies. In 2019, Girtz [signed](#) a declaration promising to protect "our immigrant and undocumented neighbors, especially those of Latinx heritage," who he claimed "face daily fears and threats from individuals and institutions such as ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]."

As Girtz attempted to obfuscate about his anti-border policies at a press conference in the aftermath of Riley's murder, he was [mercilessly](#) heckled and booed by residents. Later, an investigation by IRLI found that Girtz had privately defended his anti-border policies even in the wake of Riley's murder. The investigation revealed that Girtz had [defended](#) his city's refusal to cooperate with ICE detainers in a private email to the city's sheriff.

"I support the detainer policy as one that is both humane and following the well-documented propensity of immigrants in the U.S. to be less criminally inclined than the native-born population," Girtz wrote.

Girtz's complicity in the brutal murder of an innocent young woman and his decision to double down on his sanctuary policies after the fact make him one of America's worst sanctuary mayors.

#### **5. Muriel Bowser, Washington, DC**

The nation's capital has become a tour de force of lawlessness, and its immigration policies are a growing part of the problem.

In 2016, Mayor Muriel Bowser [boasted](#) of Washington, DC's sanctuary status in defiance of federal law.

“We celebrate our diversity and respect all D.C. residents no matter their immigration status. We are a sanctuary city because we know that our neighborhoods are safer and stronger when no one is afraid to call on our government for help, and when our police can focus on protecting and serving,” she said at the time.

In 2019, Bowser [vowed](#) to shield illegal aliens in her city from deportation after the Trump Administration announced plans for removals.

“Washington, D.C., remains a proud sanctuary city, and we are committed to protecting the rights of all our immigrant families in the face of these disturbing threats,” she said.

Yet, like many other sanctuary mayors, Bowser has demonstrated that her policies fail when put to the test. In 2022, Bowser declared a state of emergency after Texas Governor Greg Abbott [began](#) bussing illegal aliens to the nation’s capital. The city’s Office of Migrant Services later announced that they had reached capacity and were [no longer able](#) to house illegal aliens. The city has been forced to spend tens of millions of taxpayer dollars [to care](#) for illegal aliens in recent years.

Still, Bowser has remained committed to her sanctuary policies, signing a law in late 2022 allowing noncitizens, including illegal aliens, to vote in local elections.

## **6. Karen Bass, Los Angeles, CA**

While the State of California [has officially](#) been a sanctuary state since 2018, Los Angeles didn’t formally declare itself a sanctuary jurisdiction until last summer, just months after Karen Bass took office as mayor.

Shortly after the declaration, Bass [vowed](#) to accept illegal aliens bussed from Texas to her city, saying she was “not motivated by fear or hate.” After Texas Governor Greg Abbott took her up on the offer, she quickly changed her tune, saying the city’s sanctuary status was “not an invitation for people to come.”

In 2022, Los Angeles received 783 detainer arrests from ICE, and [honored](#) zero of them. While Bass wasn’t mayor at the time, she has continued the city’s policy of refusing to cooperate with ICE.

Even as homelessness continues to skyrocket among Los Angeles residents, the city has [budgeted](#) millions of dollars to care for illegal aliens, clearly demonstrating their priorities.

Late last year, a Los Angeles hotel [facing](#) a worker strike was accused of hiring illegal aliens in order to break the strike. This is a great example of how when a major city lures low-skilled illegal aliens in, they strip working Americans of opportunities.

While Bass' record is limited given her short time in office, her support for the city's disastrous status quo is making Los Angeles more dangerous.

## ***7. Mary-Ann Baldwin, Raleigh, NC***

Under Mayor Mary-Ann Baldwin's watch, Raleigh, North Carolina, has become a hotbed for illegal immigration, lawlessness and violence.

Wake County, the city's most populous county, has seen illegal alien crime reach crisis levels in recent years. On just one day in March 2022, [two dozen](#) sexual assault charges were filed against illegal aliens in the state of North Carolina, including one man who was charged with four counts of incest on a child and four counts of statutory rape.

Since 2018, a year before Baldwin took office, Wake County refused to cooperate with ICE detainers, [shielding](#) dangerous illegal alien criminals from deportation. Despite the large number of criminal illegal aliens in her communities, Baldwin has prioritized virtue signaling over security for her residents.

Just months after taking office, Baldwin created a new Hispanic and Immigrant Affairs Committee on the city council, and one of her allies [invited](#) "people who use DACA, people who might not be documented and members of the Latinx LGBTQ community," to serve on the committee. At the time, it was reported that seven percent of the county's population consisted of illegal aliens, a number that has no doubt grown in recent years.

In 2021, Baldwin [co-authored](#) an op-ed arguing for citizenship for illegal aliens, writing that illegal immigration makes her city "stronger."

"Citizenship for these undocumented immigrants is urgently needed. It's vital for our city and our state," she added.

The same year, [she signed](#) on to a letter encouraging the Biden Administration and Congress to grant citizenship to illegal aliens. Even as crime and homelessness has skyrocketed throughout Raleigh under Baldwin's watch, she [has continued](#) to prioritize the well-being of illegal aliens over her own residents.

### **8. Reed Gusciora, Trenton, NJ**

The capital of New Jersey is one of many parts of the state that has promoted anti-borders lawlessness for years, producing disastrous results.

Despite twenty-eight percent of Trenton residents [living](#) in poverty, the city has continued to prioritize illegal aliens over the well-being of its residents. During his first campaign for mayor, Gusciora [boasted](#) about his support for legislation awarding drivers licenses to illegal aliens. However, much like other sanctuary mayors, Gusciora's purported support for illegal aliens doesn't necessarily mean he wants them coming to his city.

After some of the illegal aliens Texas Governor Greg Abbott bussed to New York ended up in Trenton, the mayor [reacted](#) with consternation, saying he didn't want more illegal aliens showing up in his city, but did not know how to prevent it.

"We just don't have the resources to house them, and I think, as Christians, you want to do the right thing and provide for people. So, I think that Congress either needs to give us the resources or resolve this issue," Gusciora [later said](#) in an interview with Fox News.

The right thing to do in this situation would be for Gusciora to end his city's anti-border policies and restore the rule of law to his city.

### **9. Ron Nirenberg, San Antonio, TX**

Even as the state of Texas has banned sanctuary cities, San Antonio under the leadership of Mayor Ron Nirenberg has routinely flouted both state and federal law.

In 2021, Nirenberg [was named](#) in a lawsuit filed by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton against the city, accusing him of ignoring the state's anti-sanctuary city law, and ordering city officials not to cooperate with the federal government when it comes to detaining illegal aliens. According to *The Texas Tribune*: "The accusations state that high-ranking city officials were told 'the Mayor

does not want ICE called,' and that Nirenberg later described their release without being handed over to federal immigration officials as a 'Christmas gift' for their families.”

The lawsuit [ultimately ended](#) in a settlement. During his tenure as a city councilman, Nirenberg [backed a lawsuit](#) aiming to block Texas' anti-sanctuary city law, and proceeded to oust the incumbent mayor who opposed the lawsuit. Despite the efforts of Nirenberg and other anti-borders activists, the law remains in effect today.

While speaking to constituents in 2019, Nirenberg [bragged](#) about his city's sanctuary status, saying his city is “a leader in terms of making sure it's seen as a welcoming community that first and foremost is compassionate.”

Amidst a historic crisis at the southern border that has seen record numbers of illegal aliens enter the state of Texas, Governor Greg Abbott signed a bill making illegal immigration a state crime. Nirenberg [responded](#) by accusing Abbott of stoking the flames of “hatred” and “xenophobia.”

The crisis at the southern border has drained resources from the city and invited tragedy. In 2022, more than 50 people [were found dead](#) in an abandoned 18-wheeler in San Antonio as part of a human smuggling operation. Last year, the city's manager [revealed that hundreds](#) of illegal aliens had been sleeping in airport terminals. This year, the city's main shelter for illegal aliens [appears set](#) to close as the mayor begs for a federal bailout.

Like many other cities in Texas, San Antonio has faced significant strain from the ongoing crisis at the border. Unlike other Texas cities, San Antonio also has a mayor who has encouraged the crisis every step of the way.

Even with the hardship facing the city, Nirenberg has [continued to deny](#) the problem.

“It has not been a threat. It is not been a detriment,” the mayor said earlier this year. We are a city of immigrants. We are a nation of immigrants. It has been a challenge.”

## **10. Darrell Steinberg, Sacramento, CA**

Shortly after taking office in 2017, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg [pledged](#) to keep Sacramento's sanctuary policies even if it cost the city federal money.

“As mayor of our city, I would never trade away peoples' civil rights for money,” the mayor said at the time.



Just months, later Steinberg [participated](#) in what he described as a “solemn and peaceful” protest of a speech given by IRLI senior fellow and Former Acting ICE Director Tom Homan.

“Sacramento is open to anyone who wants to pursue the California and American dream,” he said at the protest.

The next year, as the Trump Administration sued California over its obstruction of federal immigration law, Steinberg [lashed out](#) at the lawsuit as “mean-spirited,” and “cruel.”

In 2023, after the state of Florida sent planes of illegal aliens to Sacramento, Steinberg responded defiantly, [saying his city](#) could handle the influx.

“Bring it on,” Steinberg said at the time. “You better believe we can handle it.”

However, it soon became apparent that Sacramento could not handle it. Just months after the group of foreign nationals arrived in Sacramento, [they faced](#) homelessness, and nonprofit organizations started a GoFundMe for them, demonstrating Steinberg’s inability to back up his tough talk with action.