

# Bill Summary:

## Protecting Sensitive Locations Act

Beginning in [1993](#), Democratic and Republican presidential administrations upheld policies affirming that people must be able to access places such as schools, houses of worship, courthouses, and other locations that provide essential services without fear of detention or deportation. However, over the three decades these “sensitive locations” guidelines were in place, Congress never codified limits on immigration enforcement actions in or near these areas. Without statutory protections, President Trump was able to rescind the latest guidance on the first day of his second term.

Now, the threat of immigration enforcement is eroding individuals’ and families’ ability to freely practice their faith and access important community services. When people can [take their children to school](#), go to [the doctor](#), attend [religious services](#), or [appear in court](#) without fear, families, neighborhoods, and institutions that uphold civic and religious life all stand to benefit. Congress must act to enshrine protections for sensitive locations in law so that everyone can safely access the spaces that form key pillars of community life.

### The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act

The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act ([H.R. 1061/S. 455](#)) – led by Representative Adriano Espaillat and Senator Richard Blumenthal – would limit immigration enforcement in places where essential services, education, religious activities, and civic participation occur, or within 1,000 feet of such places. Under the bill, these locations include but are not limited to:

- Places of worship and sites of religious ceremonies
- Healthcare facilities, such as hospitals, clinics, and mental health centers
- Schools and educational settings, including preschools, K–12 schools, colleges, and school activities
- Child-focused locations, including childcare centers, foster care facilities, playgrounds, and school bus stops
- Disaster relief and social service locations, including shelters, food banks, and community service providers
- Civic and government locations, such as courthouses, congressional offices, Social Security offices, DMVs, and polling places
- Public institutions, including libraries and labor union halls

The bill includes exceptions for “exigent” circumstances involving extraordinary threats to public safety, specifying that such circumstances should be “rare” and clearly defined. It also requires officers to track and report in writing all instances in which they invoke exceptions to perform immigration enforcement at or near sensitive locations.

Church World Service urges Members of Congress to cosponsor and pass the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act to uphold religious freedom and protect vital community spaces. Schools, hospitals, houses of worship, courthouses, and community service locations must remain safe places where people can seek education, medical care, spiritual support, legal assistance, and disaster relief without fear of arrest, detention, or separation from their families.

## Why Protecting Sensitive Locations Is Essential

In 2021, the Biden administration updated the sensitive locations policy to address urgent community needs amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021 guidance, known as the [“Protected Areas Memo,”](#) built upon the existing sensitive locations policy by defining “protected areas” as places where individuals access essential services or participate in essential activities. The memo directed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel to avoid immigration enforcement actions in or near protected areas.

On January 20, 2025, the Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security issued a [memorandum](#) rescinding the Protected Areas Memo. Now, ICE and CBP leave decisions about arrests in previously protected areas largely to individual officers’ discretion, guided by what the memo calls a “healthy dose of common sense.”

The rescission of the Protected Areas memo has dramatically altered daily life in communities across the country. Spaces that were previously safe havens have become [targets](#) for immigration enforcement. For example, in 2025, immigration agents attempted to enter elementary schools in Los Angeles to locate specific students, while reports from Minneapolis describe agents appearing on school grounds. Enforcement has also extended into [religious spaces](#), including the arrest of a congregant during a church [food distribution](#) event in Los Angeles and the detention of a church employee in Minnesota. Meanwhile, ICE has carried out arrests at courthouses, detaining individuals during or immediately after they attended [immigration](#) hearings in many places, undermining their right to due process.

As a result, families have [kept children home](#) from school. Healthcare providers and community clinics have reported that patients are missing [appointments](#) and avoiding preventative care. Faith leaders witness fewer congregants attending religious services or accessing resources provided by their houses of worship, such as childcare and [food assistance](#), out of fear.

Without legal protections for sensitive locations, our communities will be forced to [avoid schools](#), [medical care](#), [courts](#), or [houses of worship](#) for fear of being targeted. Our constitutional rights and the fundamental right to [practice one’s religion](#) without government interference are in jeopardy. Education, public health, and community safety will continue to suffer. Congress must pass the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act to restore communities’ access to trusted institutions and ensure that all people can access the resources they need without fear.

## Additional Resources

- Tracker: [ICE Enforcement at Sensitive Locations](#)
- Center for Law and Social Policy: [What Are Protected Areas?](#)
- Center for Law and Social Policy: [Support the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act of 2025](#)
- National Immigration Law Center: [Factsheet: Trump’s Rescission of Protected Areas Policies Undermines Safety for All](#)
- American Immigration Council: [Protected No More – How States Are Responding to Immigration Enforcement in Sensitive Locations](#)
- Venable LLP: [Trump Administration Rescinds Sensitive Locations Policy: What It Means for Institutions of Higher Education](#)
- Center for Law and Social Policy: [The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act of 2025 is Endorsed By Over 800 Organizations](#)