

San Francisco says Trump's order on sanctuary cities has deterred immigrant families from local programs

Maria Dajani has involved herself with the nonprofit Sunset Youth long enough to witness the organization change families' lives. Dajani is certainly an example of that; she grew up in San Francisco as a lonely, only child to a working single mother. In high school, she joined Sunset Youth and not only found her husband there but has since become a staff member, helping other systems-impacted families find housing and feed their children.

"It's more than just a job," Dajani said. "It's a way of living."

And in the 30 years she's tethered herself to the organization, she's also noticed a shift among the people it serves — families are more hesitant to ask for help.

The city of San Francisco has faulted President Donald Trump for that.

In a lawsuit against the Trump administration, a director of the department overseeing children and families argued the president's order to withhold funding from San Francisco has deterred involvement in city-funded programs like Sunset Youth.

The executive order, which Trump filed in April, launched a legal battle with San Francisco and 13 local governments over whether they can freely protect immigrants from being deported. Trump called such municipalities 'sanctuary jurisdictions,' and wrote if they continue to defy the administration's anti-immigration policies, they may lose federal funding and face legal repercussions.

San Francisco has been an established sanctuary since 1989, prohibiting city employees from using local resources to help ICE. The sanctuary has been challenged before, but this threat forced the city to reevaluate its spending. Meanwhile, local programs are working to protect immigrant families who no longer feel safe being served.

At Sunset Youth on Monday, that meant hosting its biweekly diaper pickup.

A cool afternoon breeze sweeps through the organization's family center in Outer Sunset, where a grandfather came for diapers and stayed so his two grandbabies could play. He joins in, pushing a baby doll in its stroller while one kid toddles after him.

Dejanai pops her head into a room where Sunset Youth founders Dawn Stueckle and her husband Ron Stueckle are sitting.

"The baby is cold. May I have a blanket?" she asks.

Before the Stueckles get too sad over the child, Dajani clarifies her previous statement: "No, the baby *doll*."

Dajani is a family success coach, overseeing the diaper drive while individually fulfilling families' needs. She's brought parents to substance abuse programs and guided others on grocery shopping. She once taught an illiterate mom how to read to her child.

Sunset Youth also counsels young people in the justice system and runs culinary arts and music production programs to engage children in healthy hobbies.

The Stueckles started the organization after they mentored children experiencing hardship as youth pastors. Now Dawn Stueckle, the executive director, said they receive \$2 million from San Francisco and serve about 500 families, including many immigrants.

Since Trump has targeted immigrants, Stueckle said she's seen small but concerning changes in families. They're afraid to take their children to school. They're afraid to go outside. They're afraid to go to court for their children.

And if they do turn to Sunset Youth for help, they're afraid to fill out a basic form required by the city.

"California — and San Francisco specifically — have always felt like safe havens," Stueckle said. "And now it feels like those safety guards are coming down as well."

Public perception of San Francisco's sanctuary has varied over time. When an undocumented immigrant shot and killed three people in 2008, for example, some people questioned whether ICE interference could have prevented the incidents.

But there's only been one federal challenge before, also spawned by Trump.

He issued the same executive order in 2017. San Francisco sued his administration, and the U.S. District Judge William Orrick granted the city and county an injunction.

Orrick ruled over the current lawsuit and sided again with the municipalities, which included San Francisco, Santa Ana County and the cities of Seattle and Minneapolis.

“Their well-founded fear of enforcement is even stronger than it was in 2017,” Orrick wrote.

Several municipality officials wrote in support of the current injunction, describing how funding cuts can harm nonprofit programs and a slew of at-risk groups, including homeless, disabled and elderly people.

Last week, the Department of Homeland Security released — to immediate backlash — its list of sanctuary jurisdictions impacted by Trump’s order. Before the webpage was removed, it included municipalities that supported Trump’s anti-immigration policies.

“This is meant to kind of name and shame,” said Benjamin Gonzalez O’Brien, a political science professor at San Diego State University. “It’s meant to exact a kind of political cost for sanctuaries.”

In San Francisco, that tactic may be working.

Mayor Daniel Lurie announced last week that next year’s proposed budget will reserve \$400 million because of Trump’s threat. The move, in turn, decreased funding in multiple city departments.

The mayor’s office didn’t immediately respond to a request for comment.

It’s unclear how the proposed budget would impact funding for Sunset Youth programs, but the Stueckles said they’re doing whatever they can to maintain trust with immigrant families.

Instead of incentivizing people with checks to join their workforce program, Sunset Youth now offers gift cards, so as not to expose an undocumented person if the payment bounces.

Carrie Peng, another family success coach, said Sunset Youth has even tried asked San Francisco departments whether the form requirement can be repealed, so families aren't scared off.

The best Dajani can do to support people she serves is replicating the gentle nature she's known at Sunset Youth her whole life — the kindness that made her never want to leave.

"I think one of the biggest things in knowing that I'm trusted is when a family comes back," she said. "If they're coming back, then they feel safe. I've impacted them in a way where they trust me. They trust my loyalty. They trust that I will hold whatever it is they're sharing, because they're coming back."

"And I've had moments where families don't come back."