



POLITICS

Florida lawmakers pass sweeping immigration bill to help with Trump crackdown



1 of 3 | A mother thanks notary Adela Morales, right, and Nora Sandigo, left, after she signed documents giving Sandigo legal guardianship of her children, Sunday, Jan. 19, 2025, in Miami. Since December, Sandigo has become the legal guardian of at least 30 children. She has been doing so for 15



BY [KATE PAYNE](#)

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Florida lawmakers passed a sweeping immigration bill Tuesday, setting aside half a billion dollars in public funds to help carry out President [Donald Trump](#) 's crackdown on those in the country illegally.

In a state where roughly [one in every five residents](#) is an immigrant, the legislation would require

every level of government — as well as government contractors — to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement “to the fullest extent possible.”

Following more than four hours of deliberations on Tuesday, Florida's Republican-dominated Legislature passed the measure largely along party lines. The passage sets up a showdown between Republican Gov. [Ron DeSantis](#) and state legislative leaders, who have sparred over whose proposals would better carry out Trump's immigration crackdown. DeSantis has called the bill “weak.”

“The whole goal of this bill is to help President Trump do his job,” said Republican Sen. Joe Gruters, one of the bill sponsors and a Trump ally who said he spoke with the president while shepherding the measure. “He wants maximum coordination with local government.”

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Lawmakers pushed the 80-plus page bill — titled the Tackling and Reforming Unlawful Migration Policy, or TRUMP Act — through in a special session, when it's harder for the public to engage in the legislative process. Republican lawmakers filed the bill after rejecting immigration proposals by DeSantis, a [rebuttal to the lame duck governor](#) who was once floated as Trump's successor.

Notably, one Republican in the House and six in the Senate voted against the measure, leaving the bill short of a veto-proof majority.

“I appreciate the attempt,” said Republican Sen. Blaise Ingoglia, an ally of the governor. “I cannot vote for this because it is nowhere near strong enough for my taste.”

Ahead of the floor debate on Tuesday, Senate President Ben Albritton and House Speaker Daniel Perez announced additional provisions, after they “requested and received technical assistance from the Trump Administration”, the leaders said.

The amendments included enhancing penalties for all crimes committed in the state by people in the country illegally, and requires that those convicted of capital offenses receive the death penalty. But the Republican sponsors declined to include some of DeSantis' provisions, like restrictions on sending money overseas by people in the country illegally and a measure that would have created a legal presumption that people in the country illegally are a flight risk.

Now DeSantis must weigh whether to sign a proposal he's bashed in public as “toothless” and “watered-down” or veto it. He could also decline to sign the bill, allowing it to become law.

The measure passed by lawmakers Tuesday would create a new state immigration enforcement office with more than 140 employees under the direction of a newly minted chief immigration officer, a post to be taken by the state's commissioner of agriculture, and would cede emergency immigration enforcement powers from the governor to the state immigration officer.

The bill allocates \$100 million for grants to local law enforcement agencies for training, equipment and reimbursement for leasing detention facilities to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. It allocates another \$375 million to fund the state's cooperation with the federal government, including efforts related to a program that deputizes local law enforcement for duties typically performed by ICE agents. It also sets aside \$25 million to give \$1,000 bonuses to local law enforcement officers who cooperate with the federal government.

Democrats repeatedly pressed the bill sponsors on the language requiring government employees to "cooperate to the fullest extent possible" with federal immigration enforcement.

"If we really don't want our (school resource officers), our social workers and our teachers defining for themselves what the fullest extent of their cooperation needs to be, then we need to define that," said Democratic Rep. Christine Hunchofsky.

Gruters said the bill is aimed at requiring more cooperation from local officials running jails and detention facilities, not "street-level" enforcement. But he acknowledged that could change with federal priorities.

The bill would also repeal a decade-old state law allowing Florida students who are in the country without legal permission to [qualify for in-state tuition](#) at public colleges and universities, which as of the 2023-2024 fiscal year benefitted about 6,500 students. In a sign of how much the state's immigration politics have changed in recent years, the tuition measure was sponsored in 2014 by the state's now-lieutenant governor, a Republican from Miami.

"I implore you today to remember the haunting yet challenging words of our lieutenant governor when she said, 'It's the right thing to do'," Democratic Sen. Darryl Rouson told his colleagues on the Senate floor. "And what has changed since then except an attitude towards immigrants?"

Democratic Rep. Jose Alvarez, who was born in Cuba and was brought to the U.S. by his parents, was more forceful.

"You all should be ashamed of yourself," he told lawmakers during a hearing on the bill, adding "This is not what this country was meant for."

The provision empowering the state's agriculture commissioner as chief immigration officer has rankled DeSantis, who said "it's almost like the fox guarding the hen house" because the agriculture industry hasn't "been known for immigration enforcement."

In his closing remarks, Speaker Perez seemed to nod at the pressure Republicans have faced from the governor and his allies.

"Threatening others to get your way isn't leadership, it's immaturity," Perez said. "I'm going to ask you to ignore the melodrama and instead focus on the work that we have to do."

Florida is among [many states](#) led by [both parties](#) responding to Trump's immigration agenda, including Tennessee, which started [its own special session](#) Monday in part to deal with the issue.

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Associated Press writer Stephany Matat in West Palm Beach contributed to this report.

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