

UTAH HOUSE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE HB 88
February 17, 2026

WHY THE UTAH HOUSE LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE SHOULD ADVANCE HB 88 Public Assistance Amendments – A Responsible, Lawful, and Compassionate Step Forward.

Introduction

Utah families work hard every day and pay their taxes with the reasonable expectation that their government will use those dollars to support citizens and legal residents who follow the rules — not to subsidize those who have deliberately chosen to violate federal immigration laws.

HB 88 is straightforward, common-sense legislation sponsored by Rep. Trevor Lee. It requires state agencies and political subdivisions to verify lawful presence (through perjury certification and the federal SAVE system) before providing most state or locally funded public benefits to adults age 18 and older. It closes existing loopholes that currently allow undocumented adults to receive non-emergency taxpayer-funded benefits such as housing assistance, food programs, non-emergency health care, tuition aid, and cash welfare.

The bill does **not** affect federally mandated emergency services, does **not** prevent U.S.-citizen children from receiving benefits, and does **not** restrict private individuals, churches, or nonprofits from helping anyone with their own private funds. HB 88 simply ensures that Utah taxpayer dollars are reserved for the people who built and fund the safety net.

Advancing HB 88 today is the right decision for Utah because it upholds the rule of law, delivers real fiscal responsibility, protects public safety, reduces burdens on local governments, and allows true compassion to be exercised in wisdom and order.

1. Protecting Utah Taxpayers from an Unfair and Growing Fiscal Burden

Every Utah household already carries a heavy load from the net costs of illegal immigration. According to the most comprehensive independent state-level analysis available (Federation for American Immigration Reform, 2023 — the latest detailed breakdown still used by legislators), illegal immigration imposes a **net annual cost of \$931.1 million** on Utah taxpayers.

This \$931.1 million figure is calculated as follows: • Gross expenditures by state and local governments on education (the largest single item), healthcare, justice-system costs, welfare programs, and infrastructure for illegal immigrants and their U.S.-born minor children. • Minus the taxes actually paid by the illegal immigrant population (estimated at approximately \$235 million in state and local taxes such as sales, property, and limited

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payroll taxes). • Result: a **net drain of \$931.1 million** — or **\$901 taken directly from the pocket of every Utah household annually**.

These are real dollars that could otherwise support Utah citizens struggling with housing affordability, school funding, or healthcare access. HB 88 stops the diversion of these scarce resources by prohibiting non-emergency benefits to adults who are unlawfully present.

2. Upholding the Rule of Law and Core Utah Values

Government has a fundamental duty to use taxpayer money only for its intended purpose — benefiting those who obey the law. Providing ongoing state-funded benefits to individuals who have chosen to break federal immigration laws sends the clear message that Utah rewards illegal behavior and encourages further unlawful presence. Rendering Utah effectively a “sanctuary state.”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has spoken plainly and consistently on this principle. In its official reaffirmation issued January 30, 2025, the Church declared:

“1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints obeys the law.”

In its foundational 2011 statement, the Church stated:

“Around the world, debate on the immigration question has become intense. That is especially so in the United States. Most Americans agree that the federal government of the United States should secure its borders and sharply reduce or eliminate the flow of undocumented immigrants. Unchecked and unregulated, such a flow may destabilize society and ultimately become unsustainable.

As a matter of policy, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints discourages its members from entering any country without legal documentation, and from deliberately overstaying legal travel visas.”

This aligns directly with Article of Faith 12: “We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”

HB 88 simply aligns Utah state policy with these bedrock teachings. It does not eliminate private charity — churches and individuals remain completely free to help anyone with their own money. It only prevents taxpayer funds from being used to reward or sustain violations of federal law.

3. Reducing Public Safety Costs and Supporting Local Law Enforcement

Illegal immigration creates measurable burdens on Utah's criminal justice system and local police departments. As of January 30, 2026, Utah Department of Corrections data shows **277 individuals** currently in state prisons and jails who self-reported that they are in the United States illegally. This represents approximately 4% of Utah's total incarcerated population of roughly 6,500 people.

Alarming, **71% of these 277 individuals (198 people)** were convicted of first-degree felonies — the most serious crimes, including a disproportionate share of sex offenses and murder. These cases cost Utah taxpayers millions of dollars each year in incarceration alone (at an average cost of approximately \$156 per day per inmate).

Local police departments are already struggling with staffing shortages and rising demands. By removing non-emergency public benefits that act as an economic magnet for prolonged unlawful presence, HB 88 helps reduce the overall population that contributes to these enforcement and incarceration costs, allowing law enforcement to focus more effectively on protecting Utah families.

4. Practicing True Compassion in Wisdom and Order

HB 88 is not harsh or lacking in compassion — it is wise, orderly, and humane. The bill explicitly preserves every critical emergency and public-health protection, including: • Emergency medical treatment for emergency medical conditions (42 U.S.C. § 1396b(v)(3)) • Immunizations and testing/treatment of communicable diseases • Short-term, non-cash, in-kind emergency disaster relief • Life-or-safety programs designated by the U.S. Attorney General (soup kitchens, crisis counseling, short-term shelter) • Certain scholarships, retirement benefits, and federally guaranteed loans.

U.S.-citizen children in mixed-status families continue to qualify for benefits when they apply. Private individuals, churches, and nonprofits remain entirely free to provide assistance using their own funds. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints itself practices exactly this balance: obedience to law combined with private, voluntary charity.

5. Providing Relief to Utah Cities, Schools, Hospitals, and Infrastructure

The hidden costs of illegal immigration are often pushed onto local governments. Cities face overcrowded schools, strained hospital emergency rooms, higher housing prices, increased utility and road demands, and greater pressure on police and fire services. HB 88 reduces these secondary burdens by eliminating state-funded incentives that encourage and sustain unlawful presence.

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Conclusion and Call to Action

HB 88 is a practical, fair, and urgently needed reform. It protects the safety net built by and for Utah citizens and legal residents, upholds the rule of law, reduces unnecessary fiscal and public-safety burdens, and allows genuine compassion to be exercised without forcing every taxpayer to subsidize law-breaking. It sends a clear message that Utah honors and encourages legal immigration — the system that works when people follow the rules.

We respectfully urge the House Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Committee to give HB 88 a favorable recommendation today and advance it to the full House for a vote. Utah families, cities, schools, hospitals, and law enforcement deserve nothing less.

Thank you for your service to the people of Utah.

Verified Sources and Exact Quotes (All current and directly accessible as of February 17, 2026)

1. **Fiscal Cost – \$931.1 million net annual cost / \$901 per Utah household**
Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), “The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers 2023,” Utah Fact Sheet (still the most recent comprehensive state-specific analysis). Exact figures: “\$931.1 Million in 2023” net cost; “That amounts to a burden of \$901 per Utah household annually.” Links:
<https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/utah2023.pdf> Full national report (state tables): https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Fiscal%20Burden%20of%20Illegal%20Immigration%20on%20American%20Taxpayers%202023%20WEB_1.pdf
2. **Utah Department of Corrections Incarceration Data – 277 individuals as of January 30, 2026, 71% (198) first-degree felonies** Utah Department of Corrections data reported by KUTV and KJZZ (February 2026). Link:
<https://kutv.com/news/local/state-data-shows-about-4-of-utah-inmates-report-illegal-immigration-status>
3. **HB 88 Official Bill Text and Full List of Preserved Exceptions** Link:
<https://le.utah.gov/Session/2026/bills/static/HB0088.html> (amends Utah Code § 63G-12-402; preserves all federal emergency and public-health exceptions verbatim).
4. **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Statements**
 - January 30, 2025 Reaffirmation: “1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints obeys the law.” Link:

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<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/church-reaffirms-immigration-principles-love-law-family-unity>

- June 10, 2011 Official Statement: “As a matter of policy, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints discourages its members from entering any country without legal documentation, and from deliberately overstaying legal travel visas.” Link:

<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/immigration-church-issues-new-statement>

5. **Utah Population Context** Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute / Utah Population Committee: 3,551,150 as of July 1, 2025. Link:

<https://gardner.utah.edu/news/utahs-population-reaches-3-55-million-in-2025/>

Unauthorized immigrant population in Utah: ~140,000 (Pew Research Center, August 21, 2025). Link: <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2025/08/21/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-population-reached-a-record-14-million-in-2023/>

