

# Virginia Governor Spanberger vetoes collective bargaining and immigrant protection bills

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In the span of six days, Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger has vetoed two significant pieces of legislation passed by the Democratic majority in the state legislature—blocking the expansion of public-sector collective bargaining rights and stripping protections against ICE arrests at courthouses, schools and health care facilities.

The collective bargaining bill (HB 1263/SB 378), passed with near-unanimous Democratic support, would have extended collective bargaining rights to more than 500,000 public-sector workers across Virginia—state employees, local government workers, school staff, and home-care providers—and established a Public Employee Relations Board with oversight and binding arbitration authority.

Virginia law has prohibited collective bargaining by public-sector workers since 1948. A 2021 law limited this longstanding prohibition, allowing Virginia municipalities to 'opt in' to collective bargaining. HB 1263 would have replaced the opt-in framework with a statewide legalization of public-sector collective bargaining, effective 2028.

Before vetoing the bill on May 14, Spanberger proposed more than a dozen amendments. One would have staggered implementation of the law, pushing back its effects for municipalities from 2028 to 2030. Another highly provocative amendment would have restructured the oversight and arbitration board to remove union representation entirely. The legislature rejected these and all other amendments, to which Spanberger replied by veto.

Her predecessor, Republican Glenn Youngkin, vetoed a bill similar to HB 1263 in 2025.

Spanberger is a former CIA agent elected to Congress

in 2018 as one of the initial intake of “CIA Democrats,” the dozens of military-intelligence agents recruited to run as Democratic Party candidates for Congress that year.

Like the CIA operations Spanberger took part in under the Bush and Obama administrations, her veto of the bargaining bill was ordered in Washington.

*The Washington Post*, mouthpiece of billionaire oligarch Jeff Bezos, ran three editorials against HB 1263 in as many months:

- March 27, 2026, headlined “Virginia collective bargaining bill would be a disaster for counties.”
- April 22, 2026: “Virginia General Assembly gives Abigail Spanberger a costly ultimatum.”
- May 13, 2026: “Spanberger's veto of collective bargaining bill is a win for taxpayers.”

The most ruthless sections of the ruling class, determined to keep labor costs from rising, made their preferences known, and the Democratic Party delivered.

Spanberger vetoed the ICE courthouse protection bill (HB 650/SB 351) on May 20.

This bill would have designated courthouses, schools, health care facilities and polling places as protected areas where federal civil immigration arrests are prohibited. It also required federal agents to present a judicial warrant, not merely an administrative one, and provide written justification before entering, and authorized the Virginia Attorney General to bring civil charges against violators. The bill would not have prevented federal enforcement of *criminal* arrests.

It is significant that polling places were protected, as Trump has promised to target them with ICE and other federal law enforcement in the November congressional

election.

The ACLU of Virginia noted that the ICE courthouse protection bill was of particular importance to domestic violence survivors—immigrants who must decide whether to appear in court to seek a protective order knowing that federal agents may be waiting for them. The bill’s sponsors called the veto “a choice not to stand up to the Trump administration’s persecution of marginalized communities.”

Spanberger disingenuously argued the bill would place local law enforcement in the “untenable position” of choosing between state and federal law. In reality, the former CIA case officer does not want to appear to sanction conflict with federal officials, so as not to encourage further protests in defense of immigrants.

With unvarnished cynicism, she said the bill wrongfully conveyed to immigrants a sense of security “where they are not protected by virtue of federal law” and it therefore “would put families at risk.” Presumably it is better to tell these targets of the modern Gestapo that they have nowhere to hide.

Spanberger opted for a political fig-leaf instead, issuing Executive Order 16, which bars federal agents from using state property as a staging or processing area without a judicial warrant and directs state agencies to develop ICE encounter guidance. It establishes a know-your-rights website. The order creates no enforceable bar to immigration arrests in courthouses and carries no penalty against ICE officers. Presumably, federal agents could build a concentration camp anywhere in Virginia, so long as the paperwork is in order.

Spanberger’s veto of these two bills confirms—for the thousandth and first time—this fundamental reality of American politics: the Democratic party is a capitalist party charged with diffusing and disorienting popular hostility to the profit system. Having ridden a wave of anti-Trump sentiment into office, Spanberger is keeping costs (i.e., wages) low and respect for authority high.

That a Democratic governor would veto a bill merely permitting collective bargaining—not acknowledging the right to strike—speaks volumes about the current state of class relations. The Democratic Party has traditionally spoken for a section of the bourgeoisie that favors the use of the trade union bureaucracy in suppressing the class struggle. Many US states have collective

bargaining for public employees and the union bureaucracies play the same perfidious role there as in the private sector.

As inflation rises and military escalation against Iran looms, the capitalist oligarchy is extremely sensitive to any concessions to workers, even formal and procedural ones, for fear of unleashing forces that they, and the discredited union apparatus, cannot control.

The logic of the ICE veto is similar. Spanberger opposes giving the slightest encouragement to the class struggle, and she is equally hostile to any measure that might promote the view that immigrants have democratic rights which they can assert.

Spanberger’s argument that *telling immigrants they have rights is dangerous* because those rights may be violated by federal agents is a cover-up. She fears that any extension of rights, even one as toothless as the courthouse protection bill, will encourage immigrants and their defenders to assert their rights more aggressively.

Her substitute, Executive Order 16, with its prohibition on ICE staging areas and its promise of a website, is precisely calibrated to create the appearance of resistance while leaving the machinery of mass deportation fully operational.

As the WSWS has documented, Trump’s immigration enforcement apparatus operates largely without judicial warrants, targets workers at courthouses and healthcare facilities, and constitutes what can only be described as a domestic gulag system under construction. Against this, Spanberger offers guidance documents—effectively a declaration of solidarity with the would-be dictator in the White House.



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