

Governor surpasses his 2025 veto mark

Polis kills bills allowing fed officials to be sued, banning swipe fees



Gov. Jared Polis holds a news conference to address his administration's "A Healthy Colorado For All" initiative at the Governor's Residence in Denver on May 21. HARMON DOBSON — THE DENVER POST

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THE DENVER POST

Gov. Jared Polis vetoed legislation Wednesday that would have allowed Coloradans to sue federal immigration officials who violated their civil rights, as well as a bill to ban large credit card companies from charging fees during electronic transactions and a bill to expand workers compensation insurance to firefighters diagnosed with certain cancers.

The new vetoes bring Polis' annual veto total to 12, surpassing the personal single-year record he set in 2025.

The civil rights measure, Senate Bill 5, was one of two policies considered by lawmakers this year to give Coloradans the ability to sue federal officials.

The other, dubbed the No Kings Act, was broader and would have applied to any federal official who violated a Coloradan's civil rights. But that bill met fierce resistance by the state's elected district attorneys, local government groups and Attorney General Phil Weiser, and two Democratic lawmakers joined with Republicans to kill the bill in its first committee hearing in early May.

Polis wrote in his veto letter of SB 5 that he didn't believe it would withstand legal scrutiny and may lead to weaker protections if it were challenged in court.

"We have seen too many examples of senseless deaths and constitutional rights violations during immigration enforcement operations and raids in recent years, and there is an urgent need for federal immigration agents to be held accountable for these lawless actions," Polis wrote.

Although Polis and his staff were supportive of the No Kings Act during its brief journey in the legislature, his office publicly distanced him from the bill — claiming that the governor was merely "open" to it — amid the intense opposition with which it was greeted.

In his veto letter of SB 5, Polis specifically blamed "overly intense and misleading lobbying from local governments and public entities" of the No Kings Act for its death during the legislative process. Polis wrote that the No Kings Act would have both passed legal scrutiny and "provided protections for Coloradans against all manner of constitutional violation by federal agents."

SB 5 was narrower and potentially more legally unsound than the No Kings Act. Supporters of the No Kings Act argued that because SB 5 applied only to some officials, it likely would be struck down by federal courts — as was a California bill that sought to prevent immigration agents from wearing masks.

SB 5's demise is the latest example of the disconnect between Colorado Democrats' identification of policy issues and their ability to address them through legislation.

Democratic lawmakers expressed anger and alarm at the scale of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown this year, and they introduced four bills in response.

But two of those measures, including the No Kings Act, were killed swiftly in committee. SB 5 has been vetoed, and the final bill, House Bill 1276, was significantly amended at the behest of Polis' office. That measure, which is still awaiting the governor's signature, now largely focuses on increasing inspections of immigrant detention centers.

Similarly, none of the three affordability bills that Democrats touted at a news conference this year will be signed into law.

One was never introduced, another died in its first committee, and a third, to prohibit so-called surveillance pricing, was vetoed Tuesday.

Also on Wednesday, Polis vetoed Senate Bill 134, a ban on so-called swipe fees. The measure faced an intense consumer-focused ad campaign that said the bill becoming law would jeopardize credit card perks like airline miles and points. In his veto letter, Polis questioned whether the proposal would survive lawsuits, provide any tangible benefit or even be workable for Colorado businesses.

"This would be a Colorado-specific carve-out to the national and global integrated payments system, and it is unclear to me how the state would implement it," Polis wrote. "This could create chaos for our business

environment, our tourism-dependent economy and consumers that want to make purchases easily and efficiently.”

Rounding out his vetoes Wednesday, Polis nixed Senate Bill 184. That measure would have expanded the types of cancer that could be considered occupational diseases for firefighters and allowed the treatments to be covered by worker’s compensation insurance. The change applied only to firefighters employed by local governments — not state employees.

The measure faced opposition from city and county governments and the Colorado State Fire Chiefs, a professional organization. The Colorado Professional Firefighters Association supported it. The measure would have lowered the standard for coverage to a preponderance of evidence that the firefighter became sick because of their work rather than the higher standard of clear and convincing evidence.

Polis wrote in his veto letter that the bill would have diminished incentives for fire departments to participate in the Colorado Firefighter Trust, which replaced state workers compensation for firefighters’ cancer claims.

“The trust provides expedited access to benefits, allows for new cancers to be added outside of the legislative process, and requires no proof that the cancer is work-related,” Polis wrote. “Under the trust, the vast majority of claims are approved sooner, more predictably, and with less litigation.”

Rep. Javier Mabrey, a Denver Democrat who sponsored SB 184, said the measure was needed to increase firefighters’ access to workers compensation, especially with the links between their work and cancer rates.

“This bill was just about making sure that when firefighters get sick based on the service they’re providing to our communities, they get the benefits they deserve and they’re not caught up in a bureaucratic system,” Mabrey said.

Polis has until June 12 to sign any bills passed during this year’s session, reject them or allow them to pass into law without his signature.

Polis also signed a slew of bills Wednesday, including:

- Senate Bill 51, which requires operating systems for personal computers to verify their users’ ages before allowing access to age-controlled software.
- House Bill 1084, which will require ballot titles for citizen initiatives that earmark revenues to state what programs and services might be cut as a result.
- House Bill 1419, which allows the state to count a recent over-refund of tax dollars due under the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights against future budgets (and immediately drew a lawsuit threat from a conservative activist organization, Advance Colorado).
- Senate Bill 160, which bans meatpacking plants from deducting the cost of personal protective equipment from employee pay and from unreasonably denying employees access to restrooms during work time.

