

Montclair Votes to Pull Funds From Citizens Bank Over ICE Ties

By Yizhu Wang

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Another New Jersey town voted to pull deposits from Citizens Financial Group Inc. over the lender's relationship to firms that operate detention centers for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Montclair, New Jersey, said it would remove its deposits and has been contacting new banks, according to a town hall meeting Tuesday, where the town's mayor and council members supported the decision. The money totaled \$64 million, said a spokesperson of the township.

"We're obviously not going to be able to solve all the world's problems, but this is something that we can do," Susan Shin Andersen, the town's deputy mayor and councilor-at-large, said at the meeting Tuesday. "We can make the conscious choice not to be complicit."

The divestment comes just weeks after Jersey City said it would pull its funds, totaling about \$265 million, from Citizens, which had \$184 billion in deposits at the end of April. The city said Citizens kept working with private-prison operators Geo Group Inc. and CoreCivic Inc., which help operate detention centers used by ICE.

"We are disappointed that Montclair Township has taken this step because the facts show that we have a strong record of corporate responsibility," Peter Lucht, a Citizens spokesperson, said in an emailed statement. "We are proud of our deep commitment to clients, customers, and communities in New Jersey and across the nation. Any claim that Citizens is not committed to its communities does not reflect who we are or the record we have built."

In April, Montclair adopted a local ordinance in which the town said it would bar federal immigration agencies from property and town records unless presented with a judicial warrant, citing its commitment to the diversity of its residents, regardless of their cultural or national backgrounds.

Earlier this year, Analilia Mejia, who's called for abolishing ICE, won a special election in the US House for a suburban New Jersey district that includes Montclair.

Towns across the state have been seeking to push back against ICE. Roxbury, New Jersey, is locked in a bitter fight over a warehouse that was set to be turned into a federal detention center. Last week, the Department of Homeland Security said it's planning to forge ahead in its plans to convert that warehouse into an immigration jail, reversing an earlier decision to sell it back to the private sector.

The Providence, Rhode Island-based bank is at the center of advocacy groups' latest efforts to push back against ICE. Years ago, some major US banks including JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Bank of America Corp. cut off ties with the private-prison industry. Citizens' Lucht said the bank's role is to provide stable, regulated and fair access to financial services, while applying its standards consistently.

"It is important to note that Citizens does not set public policy, nor do we make decisions based on political affiliation or ideology," Lucht said.

— *With assistance from Nacha Cattan*