

Don't Rush a Bad Immigration Bill

A Joint Statement by Arizona Employers for Immigration Reform and the Arizona Interfaith Network

Every now and then a crisis emerges wherein our response clearly displays what kind of people we are. Whether it is natural disaster or a man-made political crisis, our reaction sends an important message to others about our values, our sense of responsibility and how we solve problems. In the coming days our elected state representatives will vote on SB1070, a bill that sets immigration policy for every county, city and town in Arizona and unfortunately lays the groundwork for unnecessary, discriminatory and harmful government intrusions, all in the name of border security.

While SB1070 purports to address the failure of government to enforce the rule of law and make us safer, it does not. It makes us less safe, places a crippling unfunded mandate on our cities, towns and counties, damages our state's economy and codifies racial discrimination. Moreover, it does nothing to address the root causes of the immigration problem.

SB1070 makes us less safe by redirecting local law enforcement's attention away from stopping or investigating murders, rapes, property crimes, arson, and other violent crimes by mandating a focus on immigration enforcement. It does not provide funding for staff and officer training, attorneys to defend against the inevitable lawsuits, nor does it provide the additional staff needed to handle enforcement or data collection required at all levels of government.

Businesses need to know they can operate in a politically stable and economically sound environment. SB1070 threatens economic recovery by exposing every business to the threat of unwarranted police raids, frivolous lawsuits, and loss of property or business licenses simply because they may have hired or transported someone who may turn out to be undocumented.

SB1070 isolates the Latino community from police protection as even citizens will choose not to report crimes, domestic violence, identify criminal perpetrators, or become witnesses simply because they believe they, themselves, will become suspects in their home country and state. We believe this is one reason for increased gang-related crimes in Arizona, since gangs know their identities are safe behind a wall of fear.

We wholeheartedly agree that the murder of citizens and police officers, property and drug crimes, kidnappings and violence on the border must stop. We agree there is no excuse for hiring undocumented workers. And, while we firmly support the rule of law, history shows that a civil society cannot survive a network of police informants focused on one ethnic group. Furthermore, we are alarmed that such a flawed and dangerous bill might be adopted so that election-year politicians can say, "we're upholding the law," when in fact, most municipal police and public officials oppose the bill.

Business and religious leaders are deeply troubled that the bill's sponsors - Senator Russell Pearce (R-18) and Representative David Gowan (R-30), seem unwilling to seriously

address such an array of toxic consequences while rushing head long for a vote in the legislature. At a time of great economic uncertainty, it astounds us that politicians insist on moving forward with legislation even though they have been told time and again they're getting it wrong.

Arizonans are getting impatient and we clearly want immigration and border security issues resolved. However, we also want it done right. We understand the combination of election year politics and failed immigration and border security issues. But there is no good reason to push a bill that threatens one of our most precious civic values: the right to go about our lives and business without fear of government harassment.

If Messr's Pearce and Gowan, Senate President Burns (R-9) and House Speaker Adams (R-19), do not take time to reconsider the terrible damage this bill will do, then they should not hereafter expect support from our business, faith and Latino communities. If our legislative leaders insist on passing this deeply flawed and pernicious bill, then they should be held accountable in the coming election and otherwise for killing jobs and for setting up a police system that crushes the rights of our people. Finally, if the bill should pass, it is then up to Governor Brewer to protect our businesses, our economy and our sacred rights by vetoing SB1070.

If there is a right message to the world here, that's the one we need to send.

Signatories:

Arizona Employers for Immigration Reform (AZEIR)

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Valley Interfaith Project (44 churches and synagogues and institutions)
Pima County Interfaith Council (40 churches and synagogues)
Yuma County Interfaith Sponsoring Committee (14 churches and institutions)
Northern Arizona Interfaith Council (8 churches)