

# Local and State Government

Descriptions of local actions in absence of comprehensive immigration reform

*You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. You shall not oppress the stranger; you know the heart of a stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

**Exodus 23:6-9**

## **Information:**

Immigration laws and enforcement are under the jurisdiction of federal authorities. Congress has the responsibility to create and enforce laws that pertain to the entry and exit of immigrants as well as define the conditions of their employment and protection from discrimination. However, in the recent past congress has chosen not to act on the issue of immigration.

Although many recognize that the US immigration laws are broken, congress has not yet acted to reform and update them in order to meet the needs of the US labor market and immigrant families. This has led to a sharp increase in state and local entities drafting laws and policies that affect immigrants in their areas. According to a study by the National Conference of State Legislatures, 240 laws were enacted related to immigration issues in 2007, up from 84 in 2006.

While there are a few bills that offer protection of immigrants, in many cases, local bills restrict immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, in a variety of ways. Some states/localities have denied undocumented immigrants driver's licenses and certain community services. Additionally, these laws put the onus on employers, rental agencies, service providers, and universities to determine if immigrants have proper documentation. These laws can then punish those who try to assist undocumented immigrants with fines, jail sentences, or by revoking their

business licenses, even if assistance is given inadvertently.

The federal entities responsible for enforcement of national immigration laws have reached out to local and state authorities to ask for their assistance. One controversial program is the 287(g), so named for its identification in federal statutes. Local and state agencies can partner with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in order to exercise certain immigration functions. For example local law enforcement officers are able to ask about immigration status and arrest individuals for being in violation of immigration laws.

## **Insight:**

Often these policies can perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination of all immigrants regardless of immigration status. Leading to an environment that is hostile and an exodus of immigrant families, many who contribute to the well-being and safety of the community. While states and localities maintain that they are trying to protect their communities with these laws, they also admit they are hoping undocumented immigrants will leave.



There is concern about the ability of those untrained in recognizing valid documents to correctly identify an immigrant as documented or undocumented. This uneasiness with identification coupled with fear of retribution in assisting undocumented immigrants can lead to all immigrants being denied services.

Immigration is federal jurisdiction and there are implications in situations where local policies are enacted and then conflict or interfere with national laws. Further, local police agencies involved in enforcing immigration laws, move valuable resources from crime fighting and investigation in order to probe the immigration status of people. For example, during a Police Foundation Press Conference in May 2009, a police chief stated his department would have to take approximately 22 officers off the streets to answer phones and conduct immigration investigations at a cost of \$1.5-2 million. Beyond monetary costs, another chief of police stated the cost in public trust kept his department from participating in the 287g Program. He feared crimes would go unreported by victims and by-standers for fear police would question their immigration status.

**Invitation to Act:**

Find out if local agencies are partnering with federal immigration authorities and what those partnerships looks like. If local resolutions are introduced that would create a hostile or unsafe environment for immigrants, prepare to advocate for those who are without a voice.

Educate congregations and communities on the impacts immigrant communities have on the state and local communities. Invite immigrants to share their stories at a forum. This awareness and education goes a long way in dismantling prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination.

Learn more about one county's program in Maricopa County, Arizona by visiting [http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/page/reasonable\\_doubt](http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/page/reasonable_doubt). This series of articles offers extensive information on the county's partnership with immigration officials including multi-media resources and interactive maps.

**Inquire:**

In this time, many understand and know the heart of the stranger because they have been strangers in a new community, workplace, or school. Feeling welcome encourages newcomers to become a part of the community and contribute to its success. Keeping children of God out of community based on their perceived nationality perverts the justice that God makes central to the Law. Please join in prayer.

*God of justice who taught us to know the heart of the stranger, we thank you for the community and country in which we live, worship, and learn. We ask that you help us welcome all into our lives as Christ welcomed us. God we pray that you would help us search our hearts for the wisdom to craft laws and policies that are in-line with this call to welcome and love our neighbor. We pray in the name of Christ in whom we were adopted. Amen.*

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