



Immigration Bill Would Be Tough to Enforce

by : Corey Hutchins

A few years ago, Columbia resident Lloyd Dailey was stopped on his bicycle by a white city cop. The first question she asked him was, "Do you speak English?"

Dailey, an Asian American who is a U.S. citizen and has lived in the United States most of his life, is used to such remarks. In fact, just recently he was issued a traffic ticket on which a different officer wrote the letter "H" — for Hispanic — in the box on the citation marked "Race."

In both instances, Dailey made light of the situation, but it's possible things could turn out differently in the future if state lawmakers get their way.

This year, a bill that would give local cops the authority to demand immigration documents from people who they suspect might be in the country illegally when stopped for crimes, including traffic related incidents, is a priority for lawmakers. Four anti-illegal immigration bills are currently pending.

South Carolina already has a law requiring employers to verify the immigration status of employees.

The Arizona-style immigration bill is working its way through a state Senate subcommittee this week.

Critics argue such a law would lead to racial profiling among Hispanics and other minorities. Proponents say the state needs tough laws to crack down on those not following the rules.

But there are also practicality concerns should such a bill become law.

One of them is that when law enforcement officers nab a suspect on an immigration charge only, the suspect must be taken to a designated federal holding facility.

In South Carolina, there's only one such place. It's in Charleston and it only has 12 beds, according to Applesseed Legal Justice Center staff attorney Tammy Besherse.

If that facility is full, law enforcement would have to take inmates to North Carolina or Georgia. It's not a given that jailors in those states would even want to accept them.

For some, cost is also an issue.

Last year State Law Enforcement Division chief Reggie Lloyd said the state would have to spend millions to build new federally certified detention centers to house anyone arrested. He'd also need to meet with hundreds of local sheriffs and police chiefs to figure out how many officers would need to become federally trained on the laws.

On Jan. 18, the Washington, D.C.-based Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights organized a "lobby day," where community groups throughout the state could show their opposition to the bill at the State House. The Senate panel didn't have time to vote on it because legislation involving legalized raffles took too much time.

Tom Turnipseed, a local attorney and former state senator who is on the South Carolina Hispanic Leadership Council board, considers the illegal immigration issue a way for lawmakers to create a diversion that keeps attention off the state's fiscal problems.

"It's a bugaboo thing," he says, "it's nothing new." He adds that years ago lawmakers used fear of blacks, rather than immigrants, to scare white voters.

He also says the legislation shows how conservative leaders in the General Assembly aren't seriously concerned about the cost of new government programs.

"This bill is going to cost a lot of money," he says.

At least 15 state and national organizations oppose the bill.

Roan Garcia-Quintana, a Cuban-American leader of conservative groups in the Upstate, is a proponent of the bill who has testified in support of it three times.

"This crap about racial profiling is just that — it's just crap," he says. "Illegal aliens come in all shades of

pale ... it's not just the little four-foot Mexican or Indian with black hair and dark brown skin ... if we lived in Boston we'd be talking about Irish illegal aliens."

Having said that, Garcia-Quintana says he'd prefer to see tougher crackdowns on employers, or what he calls the "magnets" for illegal immigrants.

Lawmakers were to take up the anti-illegal immigration measure again Jan. 25 as Free Times went to press, but sources indicated timing might push it back another week or so. The committee was scheduled to also deal with legislation involving poker games and requiring voters to show a photo ID at the polls the same day.

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