

Dallas suburb bans rentals by illegal immigrants

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FARMERS BRANCH, Texas (CNN) -- Illegal immigrants cannot rent or own homes in Farmers Branch, Texas, under an ordinance the city's council passed Tuesday night.

The measure requires the Dallas suburb to check a renter's legal status with the federal government.

"The federal government will verify if the person is in the country legally," Mayor Pro Tem Tim O'Hare said. "If not, we will notify that person as well as the landlord in writing that they do not have the right to be in the country."

The City Council tried to crackdown on landlords who rent to illegal immigrants last year -- the latest among local and state governments to focus on illegal immigration. Yet immigrant advocates sued to block that law, and the city said it has spent \$770,000 in attorneys' fees to defend it.

The case is still in court after a federal judge blocked that law, finding that city officials were trying to control immigration differently from the U.S. government, according to The Associated Press.

Attorneys for Farmers Branch have said they believe the new ordinance clears up any constitutional questions.

"If we were sued for this ordinance and had to defend this ordinance as well, it wouldn't surprise me," O'Hare said. "We're not in this for the short term. We're in this for the long haul -- for the upcoming years and decades."

If landlords continue to rent to illegal immigrants, the new ordinance would let the city fine tenants and landlords \$500 a day.

Jose Galvez, a contractor and 16-year resident of Farmers Branch, criticized the decision.

"Basically you have to apply for a visa before you can become a resident of this city," Galvez said. "If there's a glitch where the federal government made a mistake or they don't have your proper information, you're the one who now has to prove once again you're here legally."

"There are other apartment complex owners who believe they've invested in this community before all of this and the way they're going on about this is not healthy."

In a referendum last year, residents in Farmers Branch approved the City Council's stance by a 2-to-1 margin.

Escondido, California; Hazleton, Pennsylvania; Riverside, New Jersey; and Pahrump, Nevada. have passed similar laws. Most cities said they acted out of frustration with the federal government for not enforcing [immigration laws](#) more vigorously.

"The effects of the government -- the feds -- not enforcing the law is 100 percent local," Escondido City Council member Marie Waldron said in November. "We have to deal with the overcrowding in our neighborhoods. We have to deal with the overcrowding of our schools and the diseases that our children are exposed to. Our police department has to fight the gangs."

In addition, the nation's governors are looking for compensation from the federal government for the cost of housing illegal immigrants in local jails. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California is one of a nearly dozen governors demanding that Washington pay the costs that states incur for jailing criminal illegal immigrants.