

# Judge May Not Step in to Halt Arizona Law

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LOS ANGELES — The legal effort to block what is widely considered the nation's toughest law against employers who hire illegal immigrants may be headed for a setback in Arizona after a federal judge said Tuesday that he was not inclined to stop the law from going into effect Jan. 1.

Judge Neil V. Wake of the Federal District Court in Phoenix said he would issue a ruling by the end of the week. But he said that the business and civil rights groups that had challenged Arizona's law had erred by not initially suing the county attorneys who will enforce the law, which he suggested protects the rights of law-abiding workers.

The hearing was part of a feverish legal effort to block the law, which penalizes employers who knowingly hire illegal workers by suspending their business license on a first offense and revoking it for a second.

There are two lawsuits pending in federal court to block the law. Last week, Judge Wake dismissed one lawsuit against Arizona's governor and attorney general essentially on the procedural ground that the business and civil rights groups were suing the wrong people.

In response, the groups appealed that decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and, in an effort to address the judge's complaint, filed a second lawsuit naming the state's 15 county attorneys, who would directly enforce the law.

The groups challenging the law, at a hearing Tuesday before Judge Wake, sought a temporary restraining order to halt enactment of the law until he can more fully rule on the merits of the suit.

Farrell Quinlan, a spokesman for the groups, said the legal efforts would continue.

Opponents say the law is already having an effect, with hundreds of people leaving the state or dismissed from jobs by employers checking federally required documents proving work eligibility. The law's supporters believe it will help close the door to the flow of migrants that has made Arizona one of the states with the highest and fastest-growing illegal immigrant population.