

Federal officials report more than 1,000 complaints about Alabama immigration law

By Kent Faulk -- The Birmingham News

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama -- U.S. Justice Department officials said Monday that they have gotten more than 1,000 calls or emails reporting problems immigrants are having living under Alabama's immigration law.

Tom Perez, assistant attorney general of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department, and other Justice Department and U.S. Labor Department officials **were in Birmingham on Monday** to continue gathering information and listening to stories about the impact the law is having on immigrants and looking for possible civil rights violations.

"The more we hear, as we do our listening, the more concerned we are about the impact of Alabama's immigration law on a wide range of federal rights," Perez said at a press briefing.

The Justice Department last month set up a hot line, 1-855-353-1010 and a website, **Hb56@usdoj.gov**, for people to report problems and possible civil rights violations from the state immigration law.

Some of the areas or allegations Perez said the Justice Department is concerned about include:

- Students of illegal immigrants not going to school out of fear that they or their families may be reported and possibly deported.
- Racial profiling by state or local law enforcement officers. "We are hearing troubling reports of individuals being stopped simply because of their appearance," Perez said.
- Illegal immigrants who are victims of domestic violence and other crimes fearing to step forward to report the crimes against them.
- Employers not paying employees who may be illegally in the country.

"All these allegations are very, very troubling," Perez said.

U.S. Department of Labor officials were in Birmingham on Monday looking at reports of employers using Section 30 of the Alabama immigration law as an excuse not to pay employees who may be illegally in the country. Perez warned that employers doing that would face prosecution for violation of federal labor laws.

After meeting with reporters, Justice and Labor department officials met with a group of business leaders and later with another group that included attorneys and representatives from groups that advocate on behalf of immigrants.

"I thought it was productive," said Jeremy Love, director of the Immigration and Access to Justice Program at the Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama.

Love said a number of problems being experienced by illegal immigrants were brought up in the two-and-a-half-hour meeting held at the YWCA in downtown Birmingham.

Among the problems brought up, Love said, were cases where people were held in jails, sometimes for a few weeks, without bond or a detainer by federal immigration officials.

Justice Department officials declined to discuss any specific cases or reports they may be looking into. They said no one has been prosecuted for civil rights violations related to the state's immigration law.

The Justice Department has filed lawsuits trying to block portions of immigration laws in Alabama, Arizona, Utah and South Carolina. Tony West, an assistant attorney general with the Civil Division who is involved with the Justice Department's lawsuit concerning the Alabama law, said the department is reviewing the immigration laws in Indiana and Georgia.

U.S. Attorney Joyce White Vance said that she is concerned that Alabama's immigration law may force a reallocation of resources to focus on "roadside stops" instead of concentrating on criminal aliens.

"This has made a more difficult environment for us to work in," Vance said.

http://blog.al.com/spotnews/2011/11/federal_officials_report_more.html