

Group canceling Mobile meeting: Immigration law affected sense of safety, comfort

Robert McClendon, Press-Register

MOBILE, Alabama -- A national organization of doctors and academics said they pulled out of a planned conference in Mobile because Alabama's **immigration law** "has created an environment that threatens the personal sense of safety, security, and comfort for some of our members, particularly our Latino members."

The Association of Departments of Family Medicine had planned to hold its 2013 winter meeting in Mobile, but canceled last week in protest of the immigration law, known as HB56.

The Press-Register **reported the cancellation** after the organization's board made its decision, but ADFM did not formally announce the decision until Saturday.

The ADFM represents Family Medicine departments from medical schools and teaching hospitals across the country. Its mission is to promote the philosophy and interests of family medicine in medical schools in the United States and to generally promote scholarship in the field.

"We, in ADFM, place the highest value on making sure that all of our members can attend our annual meeting without feeling personally threatened or subject to an increased level of monitoring or scrutiny," the organization said in its news release. "We support the people of Mobile, Alabama, and look forward to a time when we can bring our meeting back to Mobile."

Alabama's law, signed into law by Gov. Robert Bentley in the middle of 2011, created several strict controls on immigrants in the state illegally. Among other things, it requires law enforcement officers to check the immigration status of suspected illegal immigrants.

Critics say the act gives law enforcement too much latitude to decide who qualifies as a suspected illegal immigrant, and they speculate that it will lead to the harassment of non whites and people whose native language is not English.

The Mobile Bay Convention and Visitors Bureau estimated that the 500-600 hotel nights associated with the meeting, along with spending by attendees, **would have generated \$700,000 in economic activity**.

Allen Perkins, a doctor and the chairman of University of South Alabama College of Medicine Family Medicine Department, was ADFM's point man for the 2013 event.

He said he pushed hard to bring the meeting to Mobile. The meetings are frequently held in posh resort towns or known tourist destinations, but after the **oil spill of 2010**, ADFM wanted to bring its business to the Gulf Coast, Perkins said.

When the law passed shortly after the group decided on Mobile, Perkins said, he found himself in the position of having to explain himself and defend the city.

"We had people who felt they would not be able to jog without identification if they did not appear to be American," he said.

http://blog.al.com/live/2012/03/medical_group_explains_why_it.html