

# Immigration law opponents hold rally

Written by Brian Lyman

As opponents formed a human circle of protest around the State House, legislation that would revise the state's controversial immigration law did not come to the floor Tuesday.

Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills, the chairman of the agenda-setting Senate Rules Committee, said Tuesday morning that the immigration legislation, known as HB 658, was not on planned agendas. The Senate spent Tuesday debating the state's Education Trust Fund budget and a bill establishing start and stop dates for the coming school year.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh, R-Anniston, expressed a hope last week that the Senate would take up the immigration law changes today.

Passed last year, the law known as HB 56 criminalizes many aspects of an undocumented alien's life, allows law enforcement to check the status of those they have "reasonable suspicion" of being in the country unlawfully and provides penalties up to and including the revocation of business licenses for firms that employ undocumented aliens. HB 658 alters the law to give judges more flexibility in imposing punishments and scales back some elements of HB 56.

Opponents of the law have insisted on full repeal. The Alabama Coalition for Immigrant Justice held a rally against the legislation outside the State House Tuesday afternoon, later joining hands and forming a circle around the building in protest of the law.

Rosa Calderone, a speaker at the rally, said they intended to show undocumented aliens were "families of faith."

"We are here to show we are not criminals, or we would not be gathered here," she said.

Beatriz Feliz, 17, of Russellville was brought to the country from Mexico when she was two. The law's ban on undocumented aliens enrolling in postsecondary institutions, she said, had hampered her educational prospects, but she has no plans to leave the state.

"I would not go," she said. "I think I will keep being here and keep fighting, and not give up."

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