

## Ruling on Ala. immigration law averts exodus, groups say

By Alan Gomez, USA TODAY

Rep. Luis Gutierrez speaks during an ad hoc field hearing concerning immigration law HB56 on Monday in Birmingham, Ala. Gutierrez is flanked by Rep. Joe Baca, from left, Mayor William Bell, Rep. Terri Sewell, Rep. Silvestre Reyes and Rep. Al Green.

Some portions of Alabama's law, known as HB 56 and described by supporters and critics as the harshest state immigration law in the country, were already blocked by a federal judge. On Wednesday, [U.S.](#) District Judge Myron Thompson took an additional step by ordering the state to stop denying manufactured home registration permits to people who couldn't prove their U.S. citizenship.

The law forbids illegal immigrants from conducting any business transactions with the state. State officials had interpreted that to mean illegal immigrants couldn't get a yearly permit for their manufactured homes ahead of a Nov. 30 deadline and were also barred from getting a different permit that would allow them to move their manufactured homes on public roads.

Sam Singh of the Central Alabama Fair Housing Center, which works to ensure equal housing opportunities, said that situation forced many people to abandon their properties and leave the state. But after the judge issued a temporary restraining order — finding that the plaintiffs are likely to win their case — residents have time to register those homes.

Alabama Sen. Scott Beason and Rep. Micky Hammon, Republican co-sponsors of HB 56, have said that the intent of the law was to drive illegal immigrants out of the state. Testifying in court Wednesday, Hammon said the law was not targeted at the Hispanic population, which increased by more than 100,000 from 2000 to 2010, and expressly forbids racial profiling.

"I would not have supported the bill if that language had not been there," Hammon testified.

But the coalition of fair housing and civil rights groups that filed the lawsuit claimed otherwise.

"This case really shows the truly terrible ways that HB 56 is playing out in the real world," said Mary Bauer, legal director for the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), one of the groups who sued the state. "There's little doubt that this law was intended to drive Latinos out of the state, and that its effects have been to devastate the Latino community in Alabama."

Even some government officials who were responsible for granting manufactured home permits did so reluctantly in the weeks leading up to the Nov. 30 deadline.

In Marshall County, Ala., home to many poultry plants that employ a high number of Hispanic workers, Revenue Commissioner Joey Masters said about 20% of the manufactured home permit

applications they received in recent weeks have been denied because the applicants couldn't prove their citizenship.

"I don't think you can consider yourself human if you didn't feel for them," Masters said. "I do feel for them. I'm tender-hearted. But the way the law is written, we just don't have any options."

Mobile County License Commissioner Kim Hastie, whose office approves manufactured home permits in the county, said the immigration law would have prevented illegal immigrants from even paying the fines they would have received since that payment would constitute a business transaction. She said she would have been forced to refer cases of unpaid fines to the district attorney.

"That handicaps them all the way around," Hastie said.

Some saw Thompson's ruling as an opportunity to attack other ways HB 56 is being implemented. Karen Tumlin, an attorney with the National Immigration Law Center, said opponents of the law are looking at how they can use the ruling to attack government agencies that are denying heat and water services to people who can't prove their citizenship.

"Absolutely, we'll be exploring those possibilities," Tumlin said Thursday.

Officials with the state [Department of Revenue](#), the target of the lawsuit, and the state Attorney General's Office could not be reached for comment Thursday.

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2011-11-24/Alabama-immigration-hispanics-manufactured-home-registration/51387662/1>