

Texas Mulls Arizona-Style Illegal Immigration Law

March 3, 2011

AUSTIN (AP) – State and local police officers would be allowed — but not required — to help enforce federal immigration laws under a compromise plan working its way through the Texas Legislature.

The bill is a far cry from some of the harsh crackdowns some lawmakers proposed, but it still sparked often emotional testimony in a House committee Wednesday night. Dozens of supporters and detractors packed a hearing room outside the Texas Capitol, eager for a chance to air their views despite the late hour.

Supporters generally said the legislation would help police identify illegal immigrants who commit crimes in Texas. Critics said it would lead to racial profiling, detract from real police work and give license to rogue agents who want to harass immigrants.

The bill's author, Republican Rep. Burt Solomons, said it would prohibit so-called "sanctuary cities" and law enforcement entities from adopting policies that keep police and criminal investigators from providing immigration enforcement assistance. Republican Gov. Rick Perry put the issue on the fast track at the Capitol after making it a major theme of his 2010 re-election campaign.

Unlike Arizona's new immigration law, parts of which are being challenged in court, the legislation known as House Bill 12 does not require police officers to inquire about immigration status or enforce federal laws when people are detained. But the bill would not allow any law enforcement agency from adopting policies that prohibit them from doing so. Solomons said his proposal would establish a "uniform consistent policy" across the state.

"There's nothing in this bill that requires a police officer to ask one question that they don't think they need to ask," Solomons said. "We're not mandating anything."

It would allow police to ask about immigration status, maintain records of it and work with federal agents on immigration matters when people are "lawfully detained for the investigation of a criminal offense or arrested." Other legislation similar to the Arizona law was also proposed, but Perry's office has been working with Solomons on the compromise bill. The legislation was left pending in a House committee Wednesday night, but other bills were being debated, including one that would make English the official language and create a state database of illegal immigrants arrested in Texas.

An estimated 1.6 million illegal immigrants are in Texas, according to the Pew Hispanic Center in Washington. Nationwide, their numbers declined between 2007 and 2009, from 12 million to 11.1 million, the first significant drop after two decades of growth. But their combined

population in Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana went up by a statistically significant 240,000, the center reported last month.

Immigration curbs have caught fire nationwide. In 2010, a record number of laws and resolutions were passed by state legislatures, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, which calculated that 46 states and the District of Columbia had passed 346 measures, with an additional 10 having fallen from gubernatorial vetoes.

Former Houston police officer Rick Salter, who was shot in the face by an illegal immigrant in 2009 and who now speaks through paralyzed vocal chords, was among those urging lawmakers to pass HB 12 Wednesday night. His wife, Sue Salter, broke down in tears when it was her turn to speak.

“We’re not worried about the safety of our own citizens in our wonderful state of Texas,” she said. “You won’t know that until you’re slapped in the face by something that happens to you by an illegal immigrant.”

Austin Police Chief Art Acevedo, arguing against the legislation, said he sympathized with victims of crime by illegal immigrants. But he said local police already are helping federal officials prosecute and deport illegal immigrants without getting mandates from the state.

“We are leading through emotion and politics instead of good public policy,” Acevedo said.

Other critics said the bill could allow local police agencies, including those run by school districts and college campuses, to become de-facto immigration enforcement agents. Rep. Sylvester Turner, D-Houston, said the legislation would let rank-and-file police officers spend all the time they want enforcing immigration laws even if their supervisors don’t want them to.

“This officer ... is given the authority to say to the police chief, to the mayor, to the City Council: I don’t care how much time it takes, you can’t stop me from doing this,” Turner said.

Update 12:20 pm

William Gheen with Americans for Legal Immigration debates with **Charles Foster**, who advised President Bush on immigration issues on 1080 KRLD about “*Sanctuary Cities*” in Texas

<http://dfw.cbslocal.com/2011/03/03/texas-mulls-arizona-style-illegal-immigration-law/>