

# Let Alabama take the heat for migrant law

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Alabama now has the nation's toughest immigration law. Arizona should not compete to take back that title.

Our Legislature gave the state a break this year. No controversial immigration law was passed. No new spotlight fell on Arizona.

Yet the adjective phrase "Arizona-style" is still used to describe extreme, enforcement-heavy immigration measures such as the one just passed in Alabama.

In addition to mimicking most of the provisions of Arizona's infamous Senate Bill 1070, Alabama's law builds on Arizona's employer-sanctions law and its voter-identification law.

Alabama also goes after schoolchildren with a requirement that schools report on the immigration status of students. The idea, which has been proposed in Arizona, is to create a record of the cost of educating undocumented children as a basis for challenging the 1982 Supreme Court ruling that all children should be educated, regardless of immigration status.

Checking the status of schoolchildren will mean that kids - even some who were born in this country - will be kept out of school by undocumented parents who fear questions at school will lead to deportation. Alabama's school provisions would create a permanent uneducated underclass.

Like SB 1070, the Alabama law is built around a strategy called "attrition through enforcement." The aim is to make things so uncomfortable that undocumented immigrants self-deport.

Research by the Immigration Policy Center found that undocumented migrants often just go further underground as a result of get-tough measures. They become more vulnerable and less likely to report crime, making local law enforcement more difficult.

Other provisions in the Alabama law, such as making it a crime to knowingly rent to an undocumented immigrant and barring undocumented people from enrolling in postsecondary institutions, are also part of this strategy.

Purely punitive measures fail to recognize the human motivations driving illegal immigration.

What's more, the heated debates and cold analytical discussions often miss the fact that SB 1070 had a very bruising effect on Arizona's Latino population. The civil rights of descendants of Latino families who helped build Arizona became collateral damage.

Alabama took Arizona's SB 1070 one step further. But the approach ought to sound familiar. Kris Kobach, secretary of state in Kansas, helped write the Alabama law, just as he has helped shape immigration laws in Arizona. As a lawyer with expertise in the Constitution, Kobach probably finds it intellectually challenging to come up with state laws that will be dissected in federal courts for years to come.

The solution to illegal immigration and a humane resolution for the current undocumented population can only come from Congress in the form of comprehensive immigration reform. Arizona should focus on demanding that kind of real solution - and let Alabama take the heat for ill-conceived state laws.

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