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## **Fight over illegal immigration begins in Alabama**

The two sides in the fight over illegal immigration in Alabama discussed a proposal modeled after the controversial law in Arizona during a public hearing on Wednesday. In the second day of the legislative session, a committee in the Alabama House of Representatives heard from both sides on the bill intended to push out illegal immigrants that are here and deter others from coming to the state.

The bill, which the sponsor expects to be amended, is expected to require all employers to use the federal e-verify system to check the immigration status of workers, require jails to hold people until they can verify their status, criminalize knowingly transporting an illegal immigrant, and allow law enforcement officers to ask for proof of status during other stops.

Opponents are concerned the legislation would lead to racial profiling, mistrust by the Hispanic community, and additional costs for businesses, cities and counties. Proponents argued that those who are here illegally are a drain on public services during this economic crisis and that they are driving down wages for Alabamians looking for work.

The House Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee did not vote on the bill. The chairman, Rep. Micky Hammon of Decatur, said they could vote on the bill next week.

Most observers expect the Legislature, now under Republican control for the first time in more than 130 years, to pass legislation intended to curb illegal immigration in Alabama. Hammon said he found, in looking at numbers about two years ago, that the cost in Alabama of educating children of illegal immigrants cost about \$200 million a year. He said there will be costs to enforcing the legislation, but those would be outweighed by the costs of medical care, law enforcement, depressed wages, lost tax revenue, and education.

There is not an estimate of the potential cost here, but one opponent of the bill said Kentucky estimates the cost of a similar proposal there at \$40 million to \$80 million a year.

Shay Farley, legal director of the Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, said that Arizona is spending \$11,000 a day defending its law, that the state has lost \$15

million in the hotel industry, and that the state has lost \$17 million in tax revenue from decreased tourism spending and employment.

Some people representing the religious community and outreach groups for victims of domestic violence expressed concerns that their work could be criminalized for transporting or housing people who are not legal citizens.

Hammon said a priest could be found guilty for having an illegal immigrant in the sanctuary of his church.

Some opponents also said the federal government – not the state and local law enforcement – are responsible for enforcing immigration law.

-- posted by Sebastian Kitchen