

PRESS RELEASE

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MONTGOMERY -- Alabama Appleseed Center for Law & Justice, Inc. joins a class action lawsuit today challenging Alabama's discriminatory anti-immigrant law, HB 56, which far exceeds the reach of its model: Arizona's notorious SB 1070.

The law authorizes police to demand "papers" demonstrating citizenship or immigration status during traffic stops, criminalizes "Good Samaritan" behavior and otherwise lawful interaction between an Alabamian and an undocumented immigrant, requires schools to verify the documentation of all enrolling students and their parents, and makes it unjustifiably difficult for individuals without specific identification documents to access state facilities and services.

Alabama Appleseed has been outspoken about the damaging consequences, some unintended, that HB 56, and other ill-conceived legislation, would have on Alabama. We have sought to counsel elected officials about clear Constitutional infirmities inherent in such laws enacted at the local and state level.

"In our work with the immigrant populations in Alabama we have seen the human side of the immigration issue. The immigrants in our state, those documented and undocumented are good, hard-working people who contribute to our communities in many ways and with their purchases of goods and services contribute to our local economies and pay substantial sums in sales and other taxes. We are fearful that HB 56 will lead to another era in this state of racial profiling and discrimination and foster hate and separation, rather than welcoming and community-building," says John Pickens, Appleseed's Executive Director.

Entering into a lawsuit is a first for Alabama Appleseed and the decision was not made lightly. As an organization engaged in systemic reforms in Alabama, we believe that policy is best formulated through discourse and well-researched supporting evidence. There is no argument: the immigration system is broken. Millions of people within our borders live in a shadowy legal never-never land, vulnerable to abuses from employers, criminals, even governmental officials themselves. The key to correcting all tribulations can and must be accomplished at the federal level.

Shay Farley, Appleseed's Legal Director, states, "Clearly encroaching upon Congressional authority, this law will not stand. HB 56 and similar laws are fueled by rhetoric and frustration stemming from the lack of federal action. But, no matter how it's shaped, frustration does not equal authority. And, where a state lacks authority but chooses to act regardless, individual rights are at risk and must be protected."

To date, four federal courts around the nation have enjoined similar provisions from laws recently enacted in Georgia, Indiana, Utah and Arizona, aimed at curbing illegal immigration.

Alabama Appleseed proudly joins the other plaintiffs in this lawsuit to denounce this unlawful and misguided law. Rather than enacting laws which move our state in the wrong direction and exhaust limited resources, we encourage all elected officials in Alabama to urge the federal government to act and implement comprehensive immigration reform at the national level.

Alabama Appleseed was founded in 1999 by a number of prominent Alabama attorneys committed to public interest advocacy. Alabama Appleseed is a non-profit, non-partisan legal advocacy organization. Our mission is to identify root causes of injustice and inequality in Alabama and to develop and advocate for solutions that will improve the lives of all Alabamians.