

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

April 22, 2010 at 4:59pm

A social and racial sin in Arizona

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NCR Today

I received this urgent call to action and prayer from Sojourners Magazine regarding the brutal anti-immigration legislation awaiting the signature of Arizona's governor. The stakes are particularly high for the church: anyone in a ministry that might involve transporting an undocumented immigrant will be at risk for arrest.

Arizona's three bishops -- Gerald F. Kicanas, Thomas J. Olmsted and James S. Walland --- and Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony have joined those urging Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer to veto legislation.

Please read this and respond.

"Last week we asked you to join us in prayer as the chance for comprehensive immigration reform was looking bleak. Four days later, we have some crucial developments to share on this issue ? good and bad ? that you need to know about.

In Arizona, the harshest piece of anti-immigrant legislation in the country sits on the desk of the governor, awaiting her decision whether to sign it into law. This controversial bill would wreak havoc on the Latino community of Arizona by requiring law enforcement officials to question people about their immigration status if there is "reasonable suspicion" that the person might be undocumented.

The law is a recipe for racial profiling, distracts police from focusing on crime, and will breed a dangerous distrust between the Latino community and law enforcement ? making witnesses and victims of violent crimes afraid to speak to police. Our nation and neighborhoods are still

recovering from a similar distrust in the African-American community that was birthed out of the Jim Crow era, and we can't allow such fear to be fostered by law again anywhere in our country.

Perhaps the most offensive aspect of the Arizona bill lies in the implications for the church. Under this law, those who "knowingly transport or harbor" undocumented immigrants will be at risk of arrest. Daily ministry activities like driving people to and from church or offering shelter or food to those in need will be unlawful. This law is a direct attack on the body of Christ, because it makes it illegal to love your neighbor and care for "the least of these" in Arizona. Many church leaders have already told Arizona politicians, "we will not comply."

But we shouldn't be surprised by this new, enforcement-by-fear legislation. Arizona is reacting to a lack of national leadership on the issue of immigration. Until national immigration reform is passed, we can expect to see more state "solutions" like Arizona's as states try to tackle a federal issue. Arizona clearly portrays how our current system is broken and cannot wait to be fixed.

Enforcement-only approaches are unsustainable and immoral - they legislate fear of neighbor, do not stem the nationwide employment factors that help spur border crossing, and often devastate the most vulnerable in our communities: children.

If our nation's lawmakers can't find a way to address the reality of nearly 12 million undocumented people in this country, we will continue to deal with raids, fear, and suspicion in communities across the country. State bills similar to the one in Arizona could spread like wildfire and set legal precedent for weary border states if the federal government does not take control and introduce legislation this year.

What can you do? If you are in Arizona, please call Governor Jan Brewer at 1-800-253-0883 and tell her to veto this legislation SB 1070! The rest of us should pray for the governor, who has not indicated which way she will vote on this issue.

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Then, we need to get busy with our own senators.

The e-mail message is signed by Allison Johnson, Campaign Coordinator for Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform. Follow this link to learn more about their campaign.

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