

OPINION

# Opinion: Kentucky's anti-immigration bill will hurt state economy, lead to discrimination

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It is amazing and appalling that so few in our community know anything about [Senate Bill 1](#), an [anti-immigration bill](#) that was given the highest legislative priority in the Kentucky General Assembly's 2020 session.

According to Republican Senate President Robert Stivers, this was done because SB 1 addresses the threat of “illegal aliens” engaging in drug trafficking and draining public resources.

An examination of [SB 1](#), however, shows clearly that it targets immigrants in general. Calling it “the family separation bill,” ACLU-Kentucky strongly opposed SB 1. After heavy criticism from immigrant advocates, some changes were made to the original version of the bill. However, SB 1 which serves no valid purpose, remains seriously flawed and, if passed, will lead to a host of legal problems such as the following:

- The original SB 1 required almost all public employees, excluding those in public schools, to use “their best efforts” to support enforcement of federal immigration law. In the revised bill, a “valid and legal request” had to come from federal officials before public agencies or employees could be asked for assistance. There is, however, no way of assessing if a “valid and legal request” is, in fact, so.
- Public agency employees — though not required to assist in pursuit, detention, arrest and interrogation — can be required to collect information on the legal status of anyone they deem to be an immigrant. Determining whether someone is lawfully present is a highly complicated legal task that untrained persons cannot be expected to execute correctly.

- While SB 1's primary target would be immigrants, it could also be used for the possible arrest, detention and deportation of numerous others including those lawfully present, even permanent residents and U.S. citizens.

- It will weaken local law enforcement by putting victims and witnesses of crime at risk of being detained and deported if they report a crime.

- Many lawsuits alleging violations of constitutional rights will be filed. If they succeed, local governments will be forced to pay very large settlements since Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) does not pay them.

The community also needs to know about SB 1's high economic cost to Kentucky. Arizona's SB 1070, known as "Show Me Your Papers" law (2010), cost the state several hundred million dollars in lost jobs, tax revenue and economic activity, creating significant challenges for several key industries. About 10% of the undocumented population is estimated to have left Arizona after SB 1070 was passed.

- As in Arizona, undocumented immigrants in Kentucky are overwhelmingly employed. According to data from New American Economy (a New York-based bipartisan immigration research and advocacy organization) 88.4% of Kentucky's undocumented immigrants are of working age (ages 16 to 64).

They pay more than \$90 million each year in taxes, including nearly \$40 million in state and local taxes, and hold \$714 million in spending power that bolsters the local economy.

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- If 10% of undocumented immigrants leave Kentucky, the state stands to lose \$2.4 million in federal taxes and \$2.3 million in state and local taxes. The departure of 2,704 employed workers would mean \$71.8 million in lost wage earnings. And 1,588 additional jobs that are dependent on undocumented immigrant consumers would result in an additional \$66.3 million in lost wage earnings.

- Immigrants play a critical role in the state labor market, particularly in labor-intensive jobs. Their departure will have a drastic negative impact on many industries including food service, construction and animal production.

The hardest-hit will be the farming industry, where immigrants not only provide a reliable, efficient and knowledgeable workforce, but are, in fact, the only practical workforce available performing necessary services in all sectors of the state's agricultural economy.

Serious as the legal and economic problems would be if SB 1 is passed, its most catastrophic effect will be increased racial, religious and national profiling. This will create fear and intimidation among our immigrants in general, many of whom are already subject to discrimination in multiple ways.

It will also foster hostility and mistrust in the non-immigrant community toward immigrants who differ from them in color, race, language and dress. There can be little doubt that the passage of SB 1 will exacerbate the divides within our state, pitting Kentuckian against Kentuckian.

**Kentucky family farmers:** [Immigration bill will hurt our workers and our business](#)

In the end I pose an intellectual and moral challenge to the Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee. (There are currently 14 Republicans and nine Democrats serving on this committee). Can you refute the facts mentioned above? Did your entering politics have anything to do with doing what was in the greater good of the people, and was just and right in the sight of God?

Is voting along party lines the categorical imperative that determines your conduct, trumping the dictates of conscience and the ethics of compassion central to all major religious and spiritual traditions? Are the five Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee who hold the balance of power in their hands, aware of the overwhelming moral responsibility that rests upon them since they will be held accountable for the choice they make not only by present-day Kentuckians but also by future generations?

Finally, I want to ask those who support SB 1 if they realize that when one becomes insensitive to the situation of the most vulnerable in our midst, one also puts one's own humanity at risk?

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