



SB81: High Price to Pay to Send a Strong Message (Sen. Hickman) *Illegal Immigration is a Serious Problem...In Need of a Federal Solution*

SUMMARY

An omnibus bill modeled after the Oklahoma Taxpayer and Citizen Protection Act of 2007, [SB 81 \(Illegal Immigration\)](#) includes (*amendments may be in the works*):

- employee verification,
- cross-deputization,
- denial of state, local and federal benefits, and
- additional identification requirements.

SB 81 is loaded with punitive policies that will ultimately harm US citizens, in particular ethnic minorities and low-income people. The way to deal with serious immigration issues is not this way, but through [SB97](#) (Sen. Jenkins' task force bill, which passed committee on 2/13/08 with unanimous support). The proposed task force will allow legislators to act in a more objective and deliberate manner when dealing with immigration.

WHY NOT THIS BILL?

Recent experience with the Federal Deficit Reduction Act and its onerous citizenship documentation requirement shows that such initiatives end up missing the intended target, harming 'innocent' citizens. Denying otherwise eligible citizens critical services will add to the already unmanageable costs of uncompensated care. SB81 also poses serious threats to public health and safety by denying essential services like HIV and TB testing, primary care clinics, cancer screening, and the tobacco quit line to immigrants.¹ The meager savings (\$185,454) to the state are more than offset by the significant costs (\$3.5 million) associated with delaying care for cancer, premature infants, and other serious medical conditions. Since these costs are difficult to quantify, they are *not* incorporated in the fiscal note.

The truth is that immigration patterns are not impacted by restrictions on access to health care. This is because immigrants come to Utah for jobs. The real impact of SB81 is on citizens and legal residents and the overall health and safety of our communities. **VOTE NO on SB81.**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do we know SB81 will harm citizens?

We know from implementation of the 2006 Deficit Reduction Act and its citizenship documentation requirement that additional barriers to enrollment in medical assistance program end up hurting citizens.² Oklahoma's Medicaid program, *Sooner Care*, has dropped almost 6,000 people from the program because they were unable to meet the new documentation requirements. Most of those dropped were citizens. While the goal of additional identification requirements may be to save the government money, studies by the Government Accountability Office and other groups show no evidence of savings.³ This is not surprising since there was no evidence that immigrants were using government benefits in the first place.

Do 'illegal' immigrants use public benefits?

No. Undocumented immigrants are categorically ineligible for Medicaid, welfare, food stamps, etc. The Department of Health has effective procedures in place to flag and deny invalid applications. In the event of a life-threatening medical emergency, all individuals (including the undocumented) must be treated in the E.R. until they are stabilized (see Federal [EMTALA laws](#)). Medicaid covers most of the cost, but this makes it possible for hospitals to function as the ultimate safety net for the entire community. Numerous studies have shown that undocumented immigrants pay far more in social security taxes than they end up using in benefits.⁴⁻⁷

What is the right response to immigration?

Anti-immigrant legislation is more common in states like Utah with rapidly growing immigrant populations. The way to respond to such dramatic changes in Utah's *historically* homogenous landscape, however, is with dialogue and constructive policy changes—not panic and fear.

SOURCES & FURTHER INFORMATION

1. National Immigration Law Center (2007). Immigrants and the US Health Care System. www.nilc.org.
2. Cohen-Ross, D (2007). Medicaid Documentation Requirement Disproportionately Harms Non-Hispanics, New State Data Shows. Center on Budget & Policy Priorities. www.cbpp.org.
3. Government Accountability Office (2007). States Reported That Citizenship Documentation Requirement Resulted in Enrollment Declines for Eligible Citizens and Posed Administrative Burdens. www.gao.gov/cgibin/getrpt?GAO-07-889.
4. Urban Institute (2006). Civic Contributions: Taxes Paid by Immigrants in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area. www.urban.org.
5. California Immigrant Policy Center, Looking Forward: Immigrant Contributions to the Golden State (2005)
6. Texas Office of the Controller, Undocumented Immigrants in Texas: A Financial Analysis of the Impact to the State Budget and Economy (Dec. 2006)
7. Iowa Policy Project, Undocumented Immigrants in Iowa: Estimated Tax Contributions and Fiscal Impact (2007)