THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

ARIZONA LAW DENYING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS BAIL REJECTED

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The Wall Street Journal
October 15, 2014

A federal appeals court struck down a voter-approved law in Arizona on Wednesday that denies bail to illegal immigrants who have been charged with a range of felonies that include shoplifting, aggravated identity theft, sexual assault and murder.

An 11-member panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the law violates due-process rights by imposing punishment before trial.

Proponents of the 2006 law said the statute prevents people who aren't authorized to be in the country and skip out on their bail from committing future offenses. Critics say the law's real intent is to punish immigrants before they have been convicted of crimes.

The law, proposed by then-state Rep. Russell Pearce, was approved with 78% of the vote and was among four immigration proposals approved by Arizonans in 2006. The other measures made English the state's official language, barred immigrants who aren't authorized to be in the country from receiving punitive damages in lawsuits and prohibited them from receiving certain government services and benefits.

Arizona is one of at least four states with laws confronting the issue of bail for people in the country without authorization. Missouri and Alabama have similar laws, while Virginia has a less stringent statute in which immigrants are allowed to argue their case for bail before a judge.

A three-member panel of the appeals court previously rejected a challenge to the no-bail law, finding it didn't run afoul of the Constitution. But the law's challengers succeeded in getting a larger panel of the court to consider the case.

American Civil Liberties Union and other groups maintain immigrants are unfairly held and denied their fundamental constitutional rights.

The lawyers defending the law say the intent of the statute was to improve public safety. They also said the state law doesn't conflict with federal law.