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ALABAMA GETS STRICT IMMIGRATION LAW AS GOVERNOR RELENTS

By Campbell Robertson
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Only a day after calling a special session and urging the Alabama Legislature to make more changes to the state's immigration enforcement law than the modest ones they had passed, Gov. Robert Bentley on Friday signed the bill into law anyway.

The governor's decision was arguably the quickest of several reversals that have taken place in recent weeks as politicians in Montgomery, the capital, debated the need for changes to Alabama's immigration enforcement law, considered the strictest and most sweeping in the country.

The Legislature had seemed poised just weeks earlier to pass a bill that would make a number of changes to the original law that were intended to address complaints by business groups, local law enforcement officials and legal Alabama residents.

But in the last few days of the session, which ended Wednesday, another version of the bill gained steam, one that preserved more of the original law and also added some controversial provisions, like one requiring the state to publish the name of every illegal immigrant who appears in court for a violation of state law.

After that bill was passed, Governor Bentley added the immigration law to the list of topics lawmakers were to consider during a special session that began on Thursday. Declining to sign the bill that was passed, Mr. Bentley specifically recommended that they revisit the new provision concerning illegal immigrants in court and a provision from the original law, currently barred by a federal court, that required schools to ascertain the immigration status of enrolling students.

Lawmakers immediately responded by filing bills nearly identical to the one that passed the day before, only now requiring the state to publish photographs of immigrants in court in addition to their names.

Saying that he still had concerns about the law, Governor Bentley acknowledged in a statement that "the Legislature did not have the appetite for addressing further revisions at this time."