



STATEMENT
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MISSISSIPPI DOES THE RIGHT THING

A critical deadline came and went today in the Mississippi legislature. By failing to take up a tough immigration enforcement bill passed in the House three weeks ago, the Mississippi state Senate all but assured that no immigration measure will be enacted in this year's session.

Mississippi isn't the only state to hesitate on immigration this year. Lawmakers across the country are holding off. Some are waiting to see how the U.S. Supreme Court rules in its second immigration federalism case in so many years, *U.S. v Arizona*. In other states, including Mississippi, legislators are listening to constituents – employers, law enforcement officials, faith groups and others – who are standing up in greater and greater numbers to draw a line between sensible immigration enforcement and what they feel are unnecessary, overreaching steps likely to do damage to the state.

"The problem arises when states go beyond implementing the law," said ImmigrationWorks president Tamar Jacoby, "and use the enforcement tools at their disposal to try to drive immigrants away. Arizona, Alabama and Georgia show what can happen. All three have adopted a policy of 'attrition through enforcement' – deliberately making life so difficult for immigrants that they voluntarily pick up and leave. The result: tens of thousands of immigrants, legal and illegal, have fled those states – with devastating consequences for their economies."

As originally introduced, Mississippi House Bill 488 would have required local law enforcement officials to check the immigration status of people they stop for other reasons who they suspect are in the country illegally. It also required school authorities to inquire about the immigration status of K-through-12 students. House lawmakers sensibly removed the school census and modified the policing provision, requiring officers to check immigration status only after an arrest. Even so, Senate leaders let today's deadline pass, declining to take up even the modified bill.

What made the difference in Mississippi: business leaders and law enforcement officials spoke out persuasively, expressing concerns about the consequences of HB 488. The employer coalition that opposed the bill included the Mississippi Farm Bureau, the Mississippi Poultry Association, the state chapter of the Associated Builders and Contractors and several foresting and nursery groups, as well as blueberry and sweet potato growers. Together, they sent a strongly worded letter to lawmakers and held a press conference, arguing that HB 488 would do irreparable damage to the state economy. Meanwhile, local officials and law enforcement – the Sheriff's Association, the state chapter of the Association of Chiefs of Police, the Mississippi Municipal League, the Mississippi Association of Supervisors – complained about an unfunded mandate that would distract them from more important work, including policing.

ImmigrationWorks was proud to stand with the Mississippi coalition that spoke out against the bill. "We're grateful to ImmigrationWorks for its counsel and support," said Mark Leggett, president of the Mississippi Poultry Association. And IW commends the Mississippi lawmakers who listened to common-sense arguments from constituents concerned about the economic health and reputation of their state.

Mississippi already has a strong immigration enforcement law on the books, mandating E-Verify for all employers. That statute was implemented in stages; the last requirements kicked in eight months ago and are just taking effect. Mississippi lawmakers are wise to stop there and monitor the impact before rushing ahead with another measure that could do more harm than good.

ImmigrationWorks USA is a national federation of business owners advocating immigration reform. The organization links major corporations, trade associations and 25 state-based coalitions of small to medium-sized employers working to advance better immigration law. Their shared aim: legislation that brings America's annual legal intake of foreign workers more realistically into line with the country's labor needs.