

# [***Mexican Diplomat Slams Migrant Crackdown, Says America 'Needs Them'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BW5-GNK1-JBR6-90M1-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** A longtime Mexican diplomat opposes Oklahoma's efforts to put immigration enforcement into the hands of state personnel.

**Body**

A bill approved by the Oklahoma Legislature is viewed by a longtime Mexican diplomat as encouraging the worst "fears" about immigrants.

House Bill 4156 is going to [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Governor Kevin Stitt's desk after overwhelmingly being supported in the State House (77-20) and [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) (39-8).

If signed into law, the bill—which [*mirrors the proposed Senate Bill 4*](https://www.newsweek.com/greg-abbott-changing-texas-law-could-cripple-border-county-1885540?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) proposal in Texas that has faced [*numerous federal legal challenges*](https://www.newsweek.com/supreme-court-deals-blow-greg-abbotts-border-plans-1878427?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)—would create the crime of "impermissible occupation" and institute a series of penalties of varying degrees against illegal migrants.

"Undocumented migrants are not criminals, and they do pay taxes," said Edurne Pineda, consul of Mexico in Oklahoma, according to [*ABC*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/abc?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) affiliate KOCO in Oklahoma City. "They work really hard. They are here without papers, that is true. That is unfortunate. But they are here because they get employed, because your economy needs them. So, criminalizing them is not going to solve anything, nor is it fair."

A first offense under the new law is a misdemeanor punishable by up to one year in county jail and/or a maximum $500 fine. Additional offenses would be felonies punishable by up to two years in prison and/or a maximum $1,000 fine. Those charged would have to leave the state within 72 hours of their convictions or release from custody.

The bill also prohibits statewide municipalities from becoming "sanctuary cities."

Pineda reportedly shared her views with Stitt and House Speaker Charles McCall, the latter of whom thanked his Republican colleagues for "protecting the citizens of Oklahoma from the illegal immigration crisis plaguing our country right now."

"The failure of the federal government to address this issue, and the lack of leadership by the Biden administration, has turned every state into a border state," McCall said after the successful House vote on April 18. "Those who want to work through the process of coming to our country legally are more than welcome to come to Oklahoma; we would love to have them here.

"Those who jump the line, and skip the process, cheapen the value of the work put in by those who went through the full legal process to become a citizen of our great country. We will not reward that behavior in Oklahoma, and we will protect our state borders."

*Newsweek* reached out to the consulate, Stitt's office, McCall and other lawmakers for comment.

Following the Senate's support of the bill on Tuesday, Senate Pro Tem Greg Treat [*said*](https://oksenate.gov/press-releases/pro-tem-treat-comments-passage-house-bill-4156?back=/press-releases) that legislators made the right decision because to do nothing would be "unconscionable."

"This [*measure protects immigrants*](https://www.newsweek.com/texas-immigration-bill-inspires-another-state-1885641?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) here legally while ensuring law enforcement have the tools necessary to go after criminals," said Treat, a Republican from Oklahoma City. "The southern border crisis has created a scourge of illegal activities, including an increase in fentanyl, human trafficking and crime in our communities because of the inaction and abject failure at the federal level to secure our borders."

State Senator Michael Brooks, a Democrat from Oklahoma City, said in a post-vote statement that House Bill 4156 "is not the answer" and claims it was fast-tracked by Republican lawmakers without proper vetting and public input—potentially putting tens of thousands of immigrants in Oklahoma at risk of unfair profiling and persecution.

"My constituents, and those of other legislators, are fearful of this legislation, and rightly so," Brooks said. "We could have provided the framework to give a state ID or driver license to those individuals who comply with specific requirements, including paying state and federal income tax, verifying their identity with the state, registering their address, and submitting a fingerprint to the largest law enforcement database in the nation. These are real solutions that would move our state forward in terms of both our economy and in addressing public safety concerns."

There are more than 450,000 Mexican immigrants in Oklahoma. Immigrants make up 7 percent of Oklahoma's labor force, Brooks added, with many taking on hard-to-fill jobs in hospitality, agriculture and construction.

"They're hard-working, contributing members of communities throughout our state," he said. "Oklahoma has 33,000 undocumented immigrants who pay about $26 million annually in state income tax. We're already facing workforce shortages. How will we fill those jobs, or make up that $26 million? We need real solutions that put people over ***politics***."

Pineda took over the 51st Mexican consulate in the nation, headquartered in Oklahoma City, in May 2023. Previously, the 25-year diplomat was appointed to the consulates in Chicago, Atlanta and Dallas, where she was deputy consul general for 10 years.

She also worked as the director of economic and community affairs, and deputy general director for consular services, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2382959/kevin-stitt.jpg)

**Graphic**

Kevin Stitt

Leigh Vogel/Getty Images for Concordia Summit

Governor, State of Oklahoma, T.H. Kevin Stitt speaks during the 2023 Concordia Annual Summit at Sheraton New York on September 18, 2023 in New York City. The Mexican consulate in Oklahoma is opposing actions by Stitt, other lawmakers to provide authority to statewide law enforcement to arrest and detain suspected illegal immigrants.

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