

Immigration bill won't bankrupt state

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Body

The war of words on **immigration** has grown high-pitched, and a recent warning from Georgia Libertarians is no exception.

"The Libertarian Party of Georgia Says **Immigration Bill** Will **Bankrupt** Georgia," began a news release condemning the "Illegal **Immigration** Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011," or House **Bill** 87, which broadens the role **state** and local government play policing illegal **immigration**.

The cost to enforce it would be "huge," the release said. Its economic effects "catastrophic."

Would it?

State Rep. Matt Ramsey, a Republican from Peachtree City, is lead sponsor of the wide-ranging legislation. It would allow legal residents to sue if they think an agency is not adequately enforcing **state immigration** law; ban transporting, harboring or enticing an illegal immigrant to enter the **state**; authorize an officer to check a suspect's legal status if there is "reasonable suspicion" that the person is here illegally; and require businesses with more than five employees to use the federal E-Verify system to ensure their workers are legal residents.

Some portions resemble Arizona's HB 1070, which critics say encourages racial profiling and infringes on federal authority. The U.S. Department of Justice and civil rights groups are suing Arizona over the 2010 legislation, and major cities and organizations boycotted the **state**.

We asked Brett Bittner, executive director of the Libertarian Party of Georgia, for evidence to back his claim about Georgia's legislation. He did not have specific costs but said Ramsey's **bill** "grows the size of government."

Lawsuits challenging its constitutionality could be costly, Bittner said. Plus, the provision that would allow individuals to sue agencies over enforcement could spawn frivolous suits.

"We're not sure of the costs, and Representative Ramsey hasn't provided any of the costs," Bittner said.

Indeed, Ramsey didn't have an estimate. So PolitiFact Georgia dug up cost estimates for Arizona and **states** considering similar legislation and looked at an existing program for guidance.

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We found that estimates are extremely limited. Arizona's costs for certain HB 1070 provisions are unknown because a federal judge temporarily blocked their implementation.

We also found that the impact is so complex that it is difficult to predict.

For instance, if illegal immigrants and their families leave Georgia because of the legislation, state government would no longer have to subsidize their children's health care or education, advocates for lower immigration levels noted.

But illegal immigrants would no longer buy goods or services or work here, which could lower tax revenue and weaken the economy, critics of the legislation told PolitiFact.

Most research, though limited, concludes tax revenue generated by all immigrants exceeds the cost of the services they use, the Congressional Budget Office said in 2007.

HB 87 could save money. Gwinnett County is part of the federal 287(g) program, which allows state or local law enforcement agencies to enforce certain immigration laws. Its sheriff said this program lowered its foreign-born jail population in its first year, saving between \$386,010 and \$2.1 million. Program staffing cost \$1.2 million.

A January study on 287(g) said those local costs shift to the federal government.

If one cost is almost certain, it's legal bills.

Arizona's total is \$1.5 million as of early this month, and its governor is using donations to pay them. The American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia plans to sue if HB 87 passes as written.

Another potential cost is from lost convention business from boycotts. Roughly three months after HB 1070's passage, Arizona's Hotel and Lodging Association said at least 40 group meetings were canceled, costing \$12 million in revenue, excluding restaurant, retailer or rental car company losses. The progressive Center for American Progress estimated a total loss of about \$141 million. This translates to \$9.4 million in lost tax revenue.

Georgia's bill contains provisions that on their face appear pricey. The provision that would allow local law enforcement agencies to check immigration status would likely cost money to transport illegal immigrants to federal facilities and train officers.

The bill would let residents sue state and local agencies for inadequate enforcement, which could result in big legal bills. Ramsey said he is revising the bill to address this.

To sum up, while the potential costs could strain the state's already tight \$18 billion budget, it's extremely unlikely they would bankrupt the state.

Georgia Libertarians' alarmist statement that the bill "will bankrupt Georgia" is therefore False.

This article was edited for length. To see a complete version and its sources, go to <http://www.politifact.com/georgia/>.

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