

Immigrant Bills Could Fuel Intolerance, Opponents Say

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Body

Montgomery County Executive Douglas M. Duncan (D) and other local officials came to Annapolis yesterday to protest nine **bills** they consider anti-**immigrant**, including one that would outlaw Montgomery's acceptance of consular identification cards from Mexico and Guatemala as proof of identity.

Other measures would require local police to detain suspected illegal **immigrants** and to suspend the driver's license of anyone who knowingly permitted an illegal **immigrant** to use his or her vehicle.

Officials and **immigrant** advocates predicted that the **bills** would be voted down in committee. What prompted them to speak out, they **said**, was concern that, taken as a package, the proposals created an atmosphere of **intolerance**. Such an environment could make **immigrants** wary of law enforcement and health care agencies, endangering all state residents in the process, they **said**.

"These **bills** are mean-spirited and misguided," Duncan **said** at a news conference before two House committee hearings on some of the measures. "[They] will destroy that cooperative spirit and sense of trust we have worked so hard to create."

Duncan was joined by more than a dozen speakers, including state delegates, immigration lawyers, advocates for battered women, labor leaders and a Guatemalan who recently served with the U.S. Army in Iraq. All are members of a coalition calling itself "The Friends of New Marylanders" that has formed to fight the **bills**. Prince George's County State's Attorney Glenn F. Ivey and Montgomery County Council member Tom Perez (D-Silver Spring) also testified against the measures yesterday.

The **bills** they oppose include one that would codify the state's practice of barring most illegal **immigrants** from obtaining a driver's license, another that would require people to prove citizenship upon registering to vote, and two that would set up task forces to study how much illegal immigration costs the state and the health care system.

Sponsors of the **bills said** that they are necessary to ensure that Maryland does not subvert federal immigration laws and provide opportunities for prospective terrorists.

Del. Patrick L. McDonough (R-Baltimore County) **said** that Montgomery county has created "a quasi-legal status for Mexican [and Guatemalan] illegals" with its decision last year to accept consular identification cards. The cards are

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issued to nationals of those countries regardless of their U.S. immigration status and can be used as identification for police or to rent apartments and open bank accounts.

McDonough and others testifying in a hearing before the House Health and Government Operations Committee yesterday also complained that the Mexican government does not take sufficient care to authenticate the documents of citizens applying for consular identification cards.

The consular ID "is becoming a shield that hides criminal activity for two reasons," McDonough **said**. "First, the holder's identity was not verified when the card was issued, and second, police in jurisdictions that accept the matricula are less likely to run background checks on card holders picked up for minor infractions."

Several speakers echoed that view, including a survivor of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon. But those testifying in support of the **bills** before the Government Operations Committee and the House Judiciary Committee were outnumbered by a long list of speakers in opposition.

There also were busloads of mostly Latino **immigrant** spectators carrying signs that **said**, "We are a nation of **immigrants**." The turnout was so large at the Judiciary Committee hearing that state police turned people away at the hearing room doors.

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