

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS; Georgia 6th in nation, feds say

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Highlight: State has big share, considering its size. Homeland Security officials' estimate of the number is 400,000.

Body

Georgia has the ninth-largest population among states but it ranked sixth for the estimated number of illegal immigrants living within its borders, at 440,000, according to a new federal Homeland Security Department report.

California ranked first, with 2.8 million illegal immigrants as of January 2011, followed by Texas, 1.7 million; Florida, 740,000; New York, 630,000; and Illinois, 550,000.

The report also notes the total number of illegal immigrants living in the U.S. dropped last year by 100,000, from 11.6 million in 2010 to 11.5 million.

The federal agency listed several possibilities why the illegal immigrant population has not grown, including "relatively high U.S. unemployment, improved economic conditions in Mexico . . . and greater levels of border enforcement."

Last fiscal year, U.S. authorities deported 396,906 illegal immigrants and other noncitizens, the highest number removed in the history of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the federal agency responsible for deportations.

The Homeland Security Department revised its 2010 estimate for illegal immigrants living in the U.S. up from 10.8 million, using 2010 Census data. The federal agency did not revise its estimates in the same way for each state, so it is impossible to do a comparison between 2010 and 2011 for Georgia. The report, however, says the estimated number of illegal immigrants living in Georgia has doubled since the year 2000, when the total was 220,000. Georgia's total population in 2010 was estimated at 9.81 million.

Last year, the Pew Hispanic Center released a report estimating that Georgia was home to 425,000 illegal immigrants, as of March 2010, a figure that was unchanged from the center's 2009 estimate.

Georgia lawmakers in April of last year passed comprehensive legislation aimed at cracking down on illegal immigration. Republican Gov. Nathan Deal signed the bill into law in May, and parts of that law started to take effect in July. But the most controversial provisions are tied up in federal court amid legal challenges.

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