

## Judge Blocks City's Ordinances Against Illegal Immigration

The Washington Post

July 27, 2007 Friday, Met 2 Edition

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**Distribution:** Maryland

**Section:** A-SECTION; Pg. A02

**Length:** 680 words

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### **Body**

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A federal **judge** issued a permanent injunction yesterday **against** restrictive anti-**illegal-immigration ordinances** in Hazleton, Pa., a **city** described by its mayor as "the toughest place on **illegal** immigrants in America."

In a strongly worded opinion handed down at the U.**S.** District Court in Scranton, Pa., **Judge** James M. Munley ruled that federal law "prohibits Hazleton from enforcing any of the provisions of its **ordinances**," which impose a \$1,000-per-day fine on landlords who rent to **illegal** immigrants, revoke the business license of any employer who hires them, declare English as the official language and bar **city** employees from translating documents to another language without approval.

Civil liberties organizations sued on behalf of **illegal** and legal immigrant plaintiffs, including the Hazleton Hispanic Business Association, saying that the **city** infringed on the federal government's sole authority to regulate **immigration**.

The groups hailed the ruling as a historic victory for the **city's** Latino residents, as well as a warning to state and local governments that copied Hazleton's **ordinances** and to opponents of **illegal immigration**, who Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said "dupe local officials into adopting bad public policy that won't stand up in court."

But the opponents vowed to appeal the decision and to continue the fight to the Supreme Court, if necessary. "Attorneys have already drafted appeal briefs," said Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American **Immigration** Reform. Seeking to severely restrict **immigration**, the group strongly supported Hazleton's **ordinances**.

In a statement, Hazleton Mayor Louis J. Barletta said: "This fight is far from over. I have said it many times before: Hazleton is not going to back down. We are discouraged to see a federal **judge** has decided -- wrongly, we believe -- that Hazleton and **cities** like it around the nation cannot enact legislation to protect their citizens, their services, and their budgets."

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Hazleton made national headlines last year by passing some of the nation's strictest ordinances against illegal immigration, saying that illegal immigrants were draining city coffers but without producing evidence. About 100 similar measures were passed nationwide, some of which have been successfully challenged by immigration supporters, civil rights advocates said.

More recently, state legislatures such as those in Virginia, Oklahoma and Colorado have joined in the lawmaking, passing laws that allow police officers to question suspects about their immigration status, put illegal immigrants in jail without allowing bail and penalize businesses that hire them.

Munley struck at Hazleton's efforts with plain language, writing that the city's ordinances "disrupt a well-established federal scheme for regulating the presence and employment of immigrants in the United States." The judge said the ordinances "penalize landlords, tenants, employers and employees without providing them the procedural protections required by law." In the end, he said, "Hazleton, in its zeal to control the presence of a group deemed undesirable, violated the rights of [immigrants], as well as others in the community."

Prince William County Board Chairman Corey A. Stewart (R-Occoquan) said the Hazleton decision will not give pause to county lawmakers now seeking to deny county services to illegal immigrants and to increase local police enforcement of immigration laws.

Unlike Hazleton, Prince William County is not trying to levy fines or punish landlords, Stewart said.

The measures in Hazleton and elsewhere sprang up in the wake of unsuccessful efforts to pass a comprehensive change to immigration law on Capitol Hill.

Rudy Espinal, a business owner in Hazleton, said the ordinances "turned this town upside down" and created "an incredible amount of division." The few people he spoke with after the judge's decision "were happy," he said.

Stein said they should prepare for a fight. "We're committed to it. We've got support for it. People are willing to fund it," he said.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (92%); LAW COURTS & TRIBUNALS (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); ORDINANCES (90%); JUDGES (90%); CITY GOVERNMENT (89%); HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS (89%); IMMIGRATION LAW (89%); HISPANIC AMERICANS (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); PUBLIC POLICY (78%); REGIONAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENTS (78%); LAW ENFORCEMENT (78%); CIVIL SERVICES (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (78%); SUITS & CLAIMS (78%); LITIGATION (78%); INJUNCTIONS (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (77%); APPEALS (76%); LAWYERS (75%); BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS (75%); CIVIL RIGHTS (74%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (74%); MINORITY BUSINESS ASSISTANCE (73%); SUPREME COURTS (73%); EXECUTIVES (71%); LICENSES & PERMITS (70%); INTERROGATION OF SUSPECTS (68%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (56%)

**Organization:** AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (55%); FEDERATION FOR AMERICAN IMMIGRATION REFORM (54%)

**Industry:** LAWYERS (75%); TRANSLATORS & INTERPRETERS (70%)

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**Person:** LOU BARLETTA (58%)

**Geographic:** SCRANTON, PA, USA (79%); PENNSYLVANIA, USA (92%); COLORADO, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (94%)

**Load-Date:** July 27, 2007

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