

## Activists gird for Supreme Court's ruling on Ariz. immigration law

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### Body

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With the Supreme Court expected to rule next week on Arizona's tough law against illegal immigrants, activists on both sides are preparing to pounce on the issue, whether manning voter registration drives in Georgia and Arizona, reviving lawsuits in Alabama and Indiana or dusting off stalled copycat bills in Pennsylvania and Mississippi. Hispanic and pro-immigrant groups say they are preparing for a major disappointment from the high court, which they believe is likely to uphold the right of state and local police to question and detain suspected illegal immigrants. But they also plan to use the expected blow to rally immigrant communities to defend their rights, seek legal assistance and sign up to vote.

"Arizona will become hotter now, and this will give permission to other states to pursue their own laws, but we are already working to ensure it makes the Latino community stronger and more engaged," said Ben Monterrosa, executive director of Mi Familia Vota, a civic-action group based in Phoenix that is co-organizing public forums and media messages across the state in anticipation of the ruling.

"We have only just begun to fight," said Justin Cox, a lawyer in Atlanta with the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a lawsuit last year against laws in Arizona and five other states that allow police to check the status of suspected illegal immigrants and mandate other sanctions that may conflict with federal law. Cox said legal opponents will now challenge the laws on other grounds, including due process and civil rights.

On the other side of the divide, sponsors and supporters of get-tough laws against illegal immigrants say that if the high court upholds Arizona's statute - which makes it a crime to be in the United States illegally and allows the state to use police as immigration-law enforcers - lawmakers who have been rebuffed in more cautious states will leap into the fray and push for similar crackdowns.

"If the court rules in our favor, we will have a lot more momentum to continue the fight to protect our citizens against the invasion of illegal immigrants," said Pennsylvania state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe (R), who introduced a bill similar to Arizona's in 2010 and chairs a legislative committee that has passed other illegal-immigration bills. "Our state has had \$1.4 billion in education and health and detention costs," he said. "This affects every state in the nation."

Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach (R), a former law professor who authored much of the Arizona statute, predicts that the Supreme Court will "vindicate all the work we've been doing and the work of state legislators and city council members who are trying to take reasonable steps to discourage illegal immigration."

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Kobach said the court's ruling on Arizona will have "a huge impact" on the fate and influence of an even stronger measure in Alabama, which allows police to question and detain suspected illegal immigrants, requires schools to determine if new students are legal and bars undocumented immigrants from many transactions. "Cooperation with state and local law enforcement is the linchpin of this effort," he said.

Opponents agree that the ruling is likely to reinforce Alabama's legislative model, but they portray its impact in darker terms. They note that in Alabama, deep-rooted Latino communities have been decimated and agricultural businesses harmed by the exodus of illegal immigrants since the law took effect in September. "We have Alabama as a little window of what Arizona will look like," said Karen Tumlin, a lawyer in Phoenix who played a leading role in a lawsuit filed by half a dozen rights groups against six states. She said the Alabama law unleashed a "humanitarian crisis," with hundreds of calls to hotlines and "state-sanctioned racial profiling."

Tumlin said that no matter how far the Supreme Court goes in validating the Arizona law - which makes it a state crime to be an illegal immigrant and requires police to check the immigration status of anyone who they have a "reasonable suspicion" may be illegal - rights groups are ready to continue challenging similar laws in other states and expect it will take months for such cases to filter through federal courts.

Meanwhile, Hispanic and rights groups in every affected state say they are launching campaigns to unify, inform and defend immigrants against anticipated actions against them.

In Georgia, the Latino Alliance for Human Rights is gearing up to handle the impact on the state's population of about 800,000 Mexican immigrants. Teodoro Maus, the group's president in Atlanta, said advocates are "not very optimistic about the Supreme Court, but whether we win or lose we will keep pushing to break down the walls." He also said President Obama's new policy granting amnesty to many young illegal immigrants has "given us renewed energy."

In Arizona, a border state where nearly one-third of the population is Hispanic, a coalition of groups called Hoy Somos Arizona (Today We are Arizona) organized a 30-minute message about the law that was broadcast simultaneously Thursday on all Spanish-language media. Now, activists there are organizing community forums across the state to further prepare and organize immigrant communities.

In some states that have grappled with the issue, such as Utah and Mississippi, activists say there may be a reduced interest now in actions against illegal immigrants, in part because of opposition from business leaders and in part because of the resulting disruption of Hispanic communities.

"There is not much appetite for it this year," said Esperanza Granados, a lawyer with the ACLU in Salt Lake City. "The trend is shifting."

Esperanza said that after Utah passed a law against illegal immigrants last year, there were high-profile cases of children being threatened with deportation. "A lot of people don't want to engage in this kind of thing," she said.

But even in states with more-liberal immigration laws, immigrant groups say they are not going to let down their guard. In Florida, where activists helped defeat an Arizona-style legislative proposal last year, the groups are preparing for a new fight.

"The Supreme Court could give a potential green light to every state that has tried similar laws. We have to keep organized," said Gaby Pacheco, an organizer from the United We Dream movement in Miami. She noted that Florida, a major grower of fruit and vegetables, has long relied on immigrant farmworkers, including many who do not have papers. "We have to stay very hands-on," she said.

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