

League of Women Voters: Immigration Study, Consensus Question

#7: Should states or localities enact legislation or ordinances to:

- a) Penalize landlords for renting to undocumented immigrants?
- b) Prohibit issuance of business permits to the undocumented?

Facts:

- The City Council in Hazleton, PA, whose history was based on hard working immigrants, passed the **Illegal Immigration Relief Act, which** imposes fines on any landlord who rents to the undocumented, revokes for 5 years the business license of an employer who hires an undocumented person, and declares English to be the city's official language, forbidding employers to translate documents into another language without authorization.

Hazleton did this despite the fact that in that community Mexican-owned businesses opened, property values increased and the population grew from 23,000 to 31,000 in 6 years.

- In a suburb of St. Louis, a federal judge issued a restraining order suspending a local **Anti-Immigration Law** that would fine landlords who rent to illegal immigrants. Landlords sued the city, claiming the law to be unconstitutional and that “...*lives and livelihoods have been affected...*”
- In New Hampshire, cities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, ordinances were passed to arrest undocumented immigrants for ‘*trespassing.*’ The New Hampshire law has already been voided by the courts in that state. Other laws are still in place.
- The number of persons in the US who do not speak English well (Spanish most frequently spoken, then Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean) *grew by 65% from 1990 to 2000* with the largest growth occurring in the Midwest and South. Legislation in place that provides for ‘**Language Access Services**’ is being questioned by advocacy groups as to their implementation and costs. Types of language access services include translated service brochures, Web sites, multilingual telephone lines, bilingual customer service, considered by most private companies as a “*cost of doing business*”.

Pro:

- New restrictions are in some cases a response to increased crime that has been attributed to immigrants; cities want to reduce this crime. They see such restrictions as serving this purpose.
- Undocumented workers work for substandard wages, which leads to overcrowding in the rental housing they depend on; reduced property values and threatens to produce slum-type neighborhoods.
- Undocumented workers are viewed with unfairly competing with businesses owned by citizens and legal immigrants; and for undercutting decent wages people used to earn, for instance in construction jobs.

- Undocumented people are here illegally, and if the INS can't enforce present law, it is up to municipalities to protect legal taxpayers from the costs incurred by undocumented children in school. Translation services required for immigrants with limited English proficiency can constitute an undue burden to small business, local government, and nonprofits.

Con:

- Increasing population of documented and undocumented immigrants often brings an economic boost to communities: the growth of the number of businesses, the number of people employed and lowers the rate of unemployment.
- Landlords feel it is not feasible for them to be required to investigate immigration status, and not fair for them to be penalized when mistakes are made.
- Immigration issues and status is the responsibility of the federal government, specifically the INS. Federal enforcement of present laws is what is necessary, or people should urge the laws to be changed. States and localities should not meddle in these issues, and do not have the financial means to do so effectively.