

## Too Costly for My Town: The Dollars and Cents of an Immigration Ordinance

*Local ordinances dealing with immigration have been introduced in many U.S. cities and counties in the past year. In addition to the well-documented human costs of these ill-conceived ordinances, there are many financial demands associated with their passage and implementation.*

*American taxpayers should be concerned about irresponsible, costly measures that are not effective. The passage of an immigration ordinance at the local level is bad for the local coffers and simply bad governance.*

**Immigration ordinances are costly to implement.** To implement an immigration ordinance, a town has to extensively train all employees who would be tasked with checking the immigration status of each and every individual who is seeking that service, pay for training and other resources associated with police enforcing immigration laws, set up commissions to make sure the laws were not discriminating against minorities, among other very costly measures. Mayors and other city or county officials, who weigh the costs of the implementation, realize that these ordinances are likely to bankrupt the town. In Farmer's Branch, Texas, former Mayor Dave Blair, has stated, "It's not because I'm in favor of illegal immigration. That is not the question here. The question is what is this ordinance doing ... and it's very little. But the damage is very, very great."<sup>1</sup> On October 2, 2007, in Prince William County, the county supervisors were unwilling to move forward with the police enforcement portion of the immigration law after they found that the price tag would be a minimum of \$14 million for five years. "Immigration isn't the only issue in this county," said the board's vice chairman [Martin E. Nohe \(R-Coles\)](#). "Paying for all this is going to be difficult."<sup>2</sup>

**Immigration ordinances lead to costly litigation.** There are a number of cases filed in courts all over the country challenging the ordinances. All of the plaintiffs in these cases have been successful in one way or another. No ordinances have been implemented. Some cities have had to spend millions of dollars defending the ordinances. In Hazleton, Pennsylvania the city's insurance carrier is asking a federal judge to rule that it is not responsible for nearly \$2.4 million in attorney fees being sought by the plaintiffs who successfully challenged the city's Illegal Immigration Relief Act.<sup>3</sup> The insurer will not pay for the legal fees or the appeal of the case. What this means is the taxpayers of Hazleton, and other cities around the country will have to spend money on a case that is likely to lose in court.

**Immigration ordinances are bad for business.** The town of Riverside, New Jersey passed a restrictive immigration ordinance in 2006. A lawsuit was filed and the ordinance was never implemented; yet there were many longtime residents who left the town because they no longer

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<sup>1</sup> "Cities spend big money defending immigration-related ordinances," *Associated Press*, May 3 2007.

<sup>2</sup> "Citing Cost, Prince William Delays Immigrant Measures" *Washington Post* October 3, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> "Hazleton Insurer Says It's Not Liable for Legal Fees." *Timesleader.com*, September 19, 2007.

felt welcome. The once vibrant downtown was empty as businesses closed and the town lost revenue. On August 2007, Riverside Township Committee voted to rescind the ordinance.<sup>4</sup>

**Immigration ordinances take resources away from other priorities.** Like in Prince William County, Virginia, cities and towns in the U.S. are dealing with issues of transportation, waste management, parks, and libraries, among other responsibilities. Many of these issues take a great deal of resources. Fair-minded individuals can disagree about the best way to address the immigration debate, but in the end, Americans want their hard-earned tax dollars to be spent responsibly. Referring to the ordinance that passed in Prince William County on October 18, 2007 the Prince William County board chairman Corey A. Stewart (R) said, "The overall budget for Prince William County is \$2 billion." He called the measures "a drop in the bucket."<sup>5</sup> A close look at the Prince William County FY 2008 fiscal plan shows that all major taxes for the residents of Prince William County will increase from FY 2007 to FY 2008 and that the outstanding debt of the state is in the millions of dollars.<sup>6</sup> This kind of irresponsible spending, particularly when counties face other important budget revenue shortfalls, should concern all residents of this and other localities attempting to implement these misguided laws.

**Why is my city or county council willing to move forward despite the costs?** Many officials are misinformed about how to "fix" the problem of undocumented immigration. Since the federal government has failed to bring about reform to the law, these officials believe they can take matters into their own hands. In most instances, a local or state government cannot restrict immigration. This is a task for the federal government.<sup>7</sup> No matter what the costs are associated with the undocumented population, a locality faces a court battle if it attempts to enforce these restrictions.

*NCLR, October 2007*

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<sup>4</sup> "Riverside To Repeal Immigrant Laws," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 23, 2007

<sup>5</sup> "After Vote, Pr. William Immigrant Plan Faces Hurdles," *The Washington Post*, October 18, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Budget Summary: FY 2008 Fiscal Plan Initiatives for Prince William County,  
<http://www.pwcgov.org/docLibrary/PDF/006480.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Facts About Federal Preemption, The National Immigration Law Center, June 2007  
[http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/LocalLaw/federalpreemptionfacts\\_2007-06-28.pdf](http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/LocalLaw/federalpreemptionfacts_2007-06-28.pdf)