

How Much Will Arizona's Immigration Bill (SB1070) Cost?

Released on Wed, Apr 21, 2010

Washington, D.C.- Frustrated by Congress' failure to pass comprehensive immigration reform, states across the country continue considering legislation that relies heavily on punitive, enforcement-only measures which not only fail to end unauthorized immigration but also have the potential to dig their state's finances deeper into a hole.

The latest example of this kind of policy nose dive is in Arizona. A recent bill, "Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act" (SB 1070), was passed by the Arizona State legislature and awaits the signature of Arizona Governor Jan Brewer. As the Governor ponders whether or not to put her signature on SB 1070, she should consider the potential economic impact of the bill, which would require police to check a person's immigration status if they suspect that person is in the United States illegally. This bill, if it becomes law, will likely affect not only unauthorized immigrants, but all immigrants and Latinos in general. Given the [vital role](#) [1] that immigrants and Latinos play in Arizona's economy, and considering Arizona's current budget deficit of \$3 billion dollars, enacting SB 1070 could be a perilous move.

At a purely administrative level, Gov. Brewer should take into consideration the potential costs of implementation and defending the state against lawsuits. As the National Employment Law Project (NELP) [points out](#) [2] in the case of other states that have passed harsh local immigration laws, Arizona would probably face a costly slew of lawsuits on behalf of legal immigrants and native-born Latinos who feel they have been unjustly targeted. This is in addition to the cost of implementation. For instance, NELP observes that "in Riverside, New Jersey, the town of 8,000 had already spent \$82,000 in legal fees defending its ordinance" by the time it was rescinded in September, 2007. Also in 2007, the county supervisors in Prince William County, VA 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.

More broadly, Gov. Brewer should keep in mind that, if significant numbers of immigrants and Latinos are actually persuaded to leave the state because of this new law, they will take their tax dollars, businesses, and purchasing power with them. The University of Arizona's Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy [estimates](#) [3] that the total economic output attributable to Arizona's immigrant workers was \$44 billion in 2004, which sustained roughly 400,000 full-time jobs. Furthermore, over 35,000 businesses in Arizona are [Latino-owned](#) [4] and had sales and receipts of \$4.3 billion and employed 39,363 people in 2002, the last year for which data is available. The Perryman Group [estimates](#) [5] that if all unauthorized immigrants were removed from Arizona, the state would lose \$26.4 billion in economic activity, \$11.7 billion in gross state product, and approximately 140,324 jobs, even accounting for adequate market adjustment time. Putting economic contributions of this magnitude at risk during a time of recession would not serve Arizona well.

With Arizona facing a budget deficit of more than [\\$3 billion](#) [6], Gov. Brewer might want to think twice about measures such as SB 1070 that would further imperil the state's economic future and try instead to find ways in which she can bring [additional tax revenue](#) [7] to her state while pursuing [smart enforcement](#) [8] that will actually protect Arizonans.

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