

## Lawmakers in 28 states, including Utah, fight spread of Arizona immigration law

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SALT LAKE CITY — State legislators from around the nation — including Utah Sen. Luz Robles — have formed a group seeking to stop the spread of the new Arizona immigration law by offering alternatives that they say would reward and integrate newcomers who play by the rules.

Robles, D-Salt Lake, spoke during a national conference call to reporters announcing the formation of "State Legislators for Progressive Immigration Policy," which claims as initial members 53 legislators in 28 states.

She said that copying the Arizona law — which the Utah Legislature is expected to consider next year — would be expensive because of likely legal challenges. Such a law would not by itself stop illegal immigration and would cause "a lot of dissonance and divisiveness among communities," she said.

The Arizona law requires local police to question a person's immigration status if they have reason to suspect the person is in the country illegally.

As an alternative, the new group hopes to offer government health insurance to poor legal immigrants, pass tougher laws against employers who steal wages from workers, and to strengthen laws against racial profiling.

"We will be rewarding people who play by the rules," Robles said.

For example, she said she will again push a bill that would remove a five-year waiting period before children of legal immigrants or pregnant women who are legal immigrants can qualify for Medicaid or State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) coverage.

Besides rewarding legal immigrants, she said, "it's always more cost effective to provide adequate, affordable health care for the children" than to try later after years without care "to deal with more complicated medical conditions."

Iowa Sen. Joe Bolkcom said he wants to make it tougher for employers to exploit workers there. While recent immigrants may benefit the most from such a measure, he said, it would help all workers in his state protect themselves against employers who face only light fines if they fail to pay their workers.

Pennsylvania Sen. Daylin Leach said he is pushing to beef up laws there to ban any racial profiling — which he said would help Hispanics be more cooperative with police in solving street crime and would calm fears arising from the new Arizona law.

Robles said states are sending messages with bills — from the tough Arizona law to friendlier alternatives her group is pushing — that the federal government really needs to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

"There is no way we can fix our immigration system in a Band-Aid, statewide solution," she said.

But Jonathan Blazer with the National Immigration Law Center said on the conference call that is what will happen in the short term until Congress acts.

"The Arizona model is really a 'race to the bottom' model to see just how onerous life can be made for immigrants," he said. The new group's alternatives are instead "a rising tide that's intended to lift all boats and make sure no one group of workers is pitted against another group," he said.