

Illegal Alien Ban Adopted

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BRIDGEPORT - Borough Council adopted an ordinance banning illegal aliens from working or renting residences in Bridgeport Tuesday.

The vote, which was 6-0 at Tuesday's council meeting, approved the Illegal Immigration Relief Act with a minor amendment.

Also, council approved an amended ordinance governing rental properties requiring landlords to register and maintain housing units. Owners not living in houses are required to appoint "agents" who must live within a 10-mile radius of Bridgeport.

The rental registration measure authorizes Bridgeport's police, fire officials, code enforcement officer or director of public works to enforce the housing ordinance.

The part of the ordinance governing occupancy limits, which is based on the 2003 International Property Maintenance Code, prohibits overcrowding housing units.

Eddie Cruz, executive director of Accion Communal Latino Americana de Montgomery County (ACLAMO), protested the Illegal Immigration Relief Act and said his group may file a legal challenge against the "divisive" measure.

"It is obvious to me the ordinance could be used to foment an atmosphere of profiling," Cruz said.

Before the measure was approved, the ACLAMO official asked council to "reconsider this ordinance" and to table the proposal.

Elizabeth Vazquez, enforcement coordinator for Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County, also raised concerns about the potential "disparate impact" the measure could have on her organization's mission.

According to the agency's Web site, the group works to ensure equal housing opportunities regardless of race, religion, gender, age, disability, familial status or national origin.

Councilwoman Juanita Coover first proposed the ban at a council workshop Aug. 8.

In July, the city of Hazleton and New Jersey's Riverside Township passed measures restricting undocumented individuals from holding jobs or renting property. The Hazleton ordinance also made English the city's official language.

Hazleton's Illegal Immigration Relief Act fines landlords \$1,000 for each illegal alien tenant renting property and has the power to suspend business licenses of those employing undocumented workers.

On Aug. 15, the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania (ACLU-PA) and several immigration rights groups challenged the Hazleton law on constitutional grounds.

The groups filed the suit on behalf of 11 Hazleton residents and business owners and three nonprofit groups, according to the ACLU-PA's Web site.

After Hazleton's legal challenge, Bridgeport council asked borough solicitor Sal Bello to review the lawsuit and revise its proposed measure.

The Hazleton suit claims the ordinance violates the U.S. Constitution's Supremacy Clause, because it seeks to override federal law and the exclusive federal power over immigration.

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