

Bishops disappointed by House passage of SB 4, 'anti-sanctuary cities' legislation

April 27, 2017 - 10:22am

The Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the following media release on April 27 in response to the passage of SB 4 by the Texas House of Representatives:

Law will have negative impact on migrants in Texas

AUSTIN — The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops (TCCB) is disappointed by the Texas House's vote to pass SB 4, which will punish local police officers if they do not fully cooperate with detainer requests issued by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). SB 4 would also allow local peace officers to inquire into the legal status of people who are arrested *or* detained.

The bishops commented on the last-minute amendment which allows police to inquire into the status of detained persons, in addition to those who are arrested: "We are deeply disappointed that the House revised SB 4 to include people who have committed no crime that merits arrest or citation," said Bishop Joe Vásquez of Austin, who also serves as chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration and Refugee Services. "This will not help peace officers build trust with the migrant community, which is critical to keeping all our communities safe."

"In my testimony before legislative committees," Bishop Vásquez continued, "I urged our legislators to develop humane and respectful ways for cities and peace officers to address immigration enforcement issues. I am also concerned that SB 4 may add to the human tragedy of causing families to be torn apart, when such painful tragedies can and should be avoided. The Gospel teaches us to be compassionate to the stranger and to listen to each other. I think, unfortunately, SB 4 continues to wedge us further apart and moves us away from the pastoral and human care the Gospel tells us is our vocation."

Acknowledging governments have the right and responsibility to maintain their borders, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of the Galveston-Houston Archdiocese added, "Immigration law should be enforced in a way that is targeted, proportional and humane. This bill does not meet the standard."

"Immigrants who come to this country to work or to flee violence are not a threat to our safety," explained Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller of the San Antonio Archdiocese. "Sadly, this legislation will suppress their ability to contribute to our society and economy, and as a matter of principle, the unity of families must be safeguarded."

The bishops expressed gratitude for the legislators who lead the opposition to the bill, as well as Catholics and others from throughout the state who opposed it. “Thousands of Catholics joined with fellow Texans to testify, rally and encourage their representatives to stop this legislation,” explained Jennifer Carr Allmon, executive director of the TCCB. “We thank those who have taken a principled stance in solidarity with immigrants, and who have worked so hard in this cause.”

The Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops is the association of the Roman Catholic bishops of Texas. Through the TCCB, the bishops provide a moral and social public policy voice that includes monitoring all legislation pertaining to Catholic moral and social teaching; accredit the state's Catholic schools; and maintain records that reflect the work and the history of the Catholic Church in Texas.