

AL Immigration Law Backers Look At Changes

Phillip Rawls, Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Some of the Republicans who voted for Alabama's new immigration law are considering changes that they say will make the law easier to understand but won't weaken it.

"I made some mistakes in voting for this bill, and I want to step up and fix them," Republican Sen. Gerald Dial of Lineville said Wednesday.

Dial said he's working with a few other Republican senators to try to make sure that people renewing their professional licenses and people buying car tags only have to prove their legal residency in Alabama once rather than every year.

Dial, a former teacher and coach, said he would also like to take out the part of the law that requires schools to check the legal residency of new students, but he doubts there is enough support for removing that part of the law. That provision has also been put on hold by the federal courts.

Another Republican senator working with Dial, Montgomery car dealer Dick Brewbaker, said the documents needed to buy a vehicle and the documents needed to get a tag aren't the same in the law, and they should be.

"It's clearly crazy and causing a lot of confusion for people who just moved into the state," he said.

The bill's House sponsor, Republican Micky Hammon of Decatur, said he wants to clarify that all military IDs are acceptable for proving legal residency, but he's opposed to major changes.

"We will discuss tweaking some definitions and making the law more user friendly, but we will not weaken the bill," Hammon said Wednesday.

Making even minor changes may be difficult.

Senate President Pro Tem Del Marsh of Anniston said he doesn't want to consider any changes unless they are recommended by the attorney general, who is defending the law against legal challenges by the U.S. Justice Department and others.

"Any changes will have to be at the direction of the attorney general," he said.

"Until that happens, that is not an issue in my opinion for the next legislative session," he said.

House Speaker Mike Hubbard of Auburn said he's open to minor changes, such as

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making sure military IDs can be used to buy car tags. "Obviously that was never intended to not be allowed," he said.

Democratic Sen. Billy Beasley has written legislation to repeal the law. Beasley, who voted against the law in June, said Wednesday the negative national exposure the law has brought to Alabama is evidence that the law is mean-spirited and discriminatory against Hispanics.

"What we've done is tell the Hispanics we don't want you in Alabama. Legal Hispanics are leaving as well as illegals," he said.

Supporters of the law say it won't be repealed because it enjoys wide support in the state.

"We are not going to suspend it," Hubbard said.

The chief executive of Alabama's state pension system, David Bronner, said last week that other states competing with Alabama for foreign-owned industries are using the law to portray Alabama as an unfriendly place.

Hubbard and Marsh disputed that at their news conference Wednesday. "I've talked to our industrial recruiters and it's not been an issue for them," the speaker said.

But in an interview later, Thomasville Mayor Sheldon Day said it is. He said officials from about 25 foreign companies have visited the southwest Alabama town to consider possible plant sites since Thomasville recruited a Canadian steel company in July 2010.

"Up until a few months ago, nobody raised the immigration issue," he said. But in the last few months, he said it's brought up regularly because he believes competing states are mentioning it in their negotiations and trying to portray Alabama as unwelcoming to foreigners even though that is not the truth. From the questions he gets from industrial prospects, he also suspects competing states are recounting stories from Alabama's civil rights past.

"It's bringing back old images from 40 or 50 year ago," he said.

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