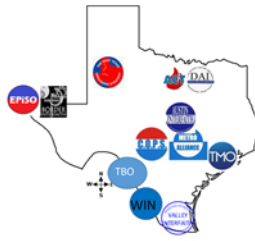




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Texas IAF Organizations



For Immediate Release
February 2, 2017

MEDIA ADVISORY: A media conference with representatives from the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, Christian Life Commission and Austin Interfaith will be held today, Thursday, Feb. 2, at noon in the Speaker's Committee Room, 2W.6, of the Texas Capitol.

Faith-based groups stand against SB4 and other anti-immigrant legislation

AUSTIN — A coalition of faith-based organizations, including the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, Austin Interfaith and the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, are stepping up the pressure for the Texas Legislature to reject so-called "anti-sanctuary city" bills.

In testimony today against Senate Bill 4, which Governor Greg Abbott has declared to be a priority, Bishop Joe Vásquez of Austin said, "We reject the premise that persons who are merely suspected of being undocumented immigrants should be rounded up by state and local police agents."

Requiring local law enforcement to enforce federal regulations will reduce communications between peace officers and immigrant communities, regardless of their documented status. It will also negatively impact the ability of others attempting to assist minorities.

"SB 4 will force many immigrants, undocumented or otherwise, into the shadows out of fear of being unfairly targeted simply because of the color of their skin," explained Dr. Gus Reyes, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. "We are worried our people will be afraid to attend worship services on Sunday morning. This will have a chilling effect on the relationship between immigrant communities and law enforcement, but it will also negatively impact many of our congregations."

SB4 would also take local police away from their primary service -- maintaining law and order in their communities -- and will create more centralization of legal authority in Washington, as opposed to keeping clear distinction between state and federal authority.

"This bill requires local police and sheriff's deputies to enforce federal immigration laws as if their job of maintaining public order and the public safety weren't difficult enough as it is," said

John Elford, senior pastor of University United Methodist Church and a member of Austin Interfaith and the Network of Texas IAF Organizations. "It creates a chilling effect that undermines public safety, families and the well-being of the community. I find it hard to imagine how this is not evident to the leaders of our state."

SB4, if passed, will punish local communities by withdrawing state funds for urgently needed services for law-abiding citizens, and punish immigrants who are attempting to improve their lives. "The immigrant who travels to Texas because he needs a job or because she is in despair or abused is in need of the basic necessities to live," Bishop Vásquez said. "This type of immigrant, which constitutes the majority of immigrants, is not a threat to our safety like the cartels, or traffickers, or terrorists. Federal agents should focus upon those who truly threaten public safety: cartel members, human traffickers, smugglers, and terrorists."

"I am disappointed that so many of our state leaders are pushing legislation that, in our view, treats immigrants in a way that fails to reflect the respect due to every human being made in the image and likeness of God," said Jennifer Carr Allmon, executive director of the Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops.

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.

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Media Contact

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MEDIA ADVISORY: A media conference will be held today, Thursday, Feb. 2, at noon in the Speaker's Committee Room, 2W.6, of the Texas Capitol. Speakers include:

- Bishop Joe Vasquez, bishop of the Diocese of Austin and chair of the US Catholic bishops' Committee on Migration and Refugee Services
- Dr. Gus Reyes, director of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission
- Rev. John Elford, senior pastor of University United Methodist Church and a member of Austin Interfaith and the Network of Texas IAF Organizations
- Rev. Frederick Clarkson, rector, St. Timothy Episcopal Church, TMO Houston and the Network of Texas IAF Organizations