

Arizona Catholic Conference Bishops' Statement Against Proposition 200

The Protect Arizona Now Initiative (Proposition 200) is one of the most controversial measures that voters will decide in November. Nonetheless, despite the intense rhetoric surrounding this proposal, Proposition 200 is largely a symbolic issue that will do nothing to solve the complex immigration problems facing our state or reduce the number of immigrants crossing the border.

The supporters of Proposition 200 claim that this measure is needed to prevent undocumented immigrants from voting or receiving welfare benefits. There is, however, no documentation of widespread problems in these areas, largely because current law already prohibits undocumented immigrants from voting or receiving welfare benefits.

A careful analysis of Proposition 200 reveals that it will indeed do nothing to "Protect Arizona." Provisions in this initiative, however, will make government employees criminals if they do not report undocumented immigrants. Additionally, while welfare benefits are currently not available to undocumented immigrants, it is uncertain whether other public benefits such as police, sanitation, and fire protection may be denied to people under Proposition 200, unless valid identification can first be produced. These benefits are basic rights to which all humans are entitled, regardless of immigration status and should not be contingent on unnecessary requirements.

Furthermore, federal law already requires that emergency health and education be provided to all, including undocumented immigrants. Under Proposition 200, this situation will not be changed. An undocumented child, however, who has the right to attend elementary school, will almost certainly be unable to obtain a library card under this initiative because it is a public benefit. Similarly, the use of public parks for family celebrations and picnics could well be prohibited for people who do not first prove their citizenship.

The Catholic Church recognizes that a sovereign state has the right to control its borders in furtherance of the common good. Nonetheless, all human beings are entitled to basic inalienable rights. In the Holy Father's Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation entitled, "The Church in America," it is specifically noted that "attention must be called to the rights of migrants and their families and to respect for their human dignity, even in cases of non-legal immigration (emphasis added)."

It is in accordance with this spirit that the bishops of the Arizona Catholic Conference oppose Proposition 200. While Proposition 200 does nothing to control our borders or solve the complex immigration problems in our state, it will potentially make criminals out of well-meaning government workers and deny basic rights to undocumented immigrants. Consequently, we believe that such legislation is bad public policy.

Today's undocumented immigrants come to our country for reasons of economic despair and family unification. These hardworking immigrants are people of remarkable faith and piety. Their pro-life and pro-family values can be a great asset to our culture and to our Church. We certainly do not need to "Protect Arizona" from these immigrants, but we do have an obligation to protect their basic rights and say no to Proposition 200.