

# **‘Sanctuary city’ ban could undermine trust, religious leaders assert**

March 19, 2015

AUSTIN—Some Texas lawmakers want to eliminate the possibility that local rules would prohibit police from questioning detained individuals about their immigration status. But religious leaders warned that could lead to racial profiling and break down trust between communities and law enforcement.

The Senate Subcommittee on Border Security heard several hours of testimony on [SB 185](#), introduced by [Sen. Charles Perry, R-Lubbock](#), to ban so-called “sanctuary cities” in Texas. A previous effort, supported by Gov. Rick Perry in 2011, failed in both the regular session and a special session.

“It will bring about racial profiling,” said John Ogletree, pastor of First Metropolitan Baptist Church in Houston. He [spoke against SB 185](#) on behalf of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation and The Metropolitan Organization, a network of institutions committed to engaging citizens in community transformation.

“The bedrock of community policing is trust,” Ogletree said, noting successful initiatives in Houston to engage immigrants in reporting crime and relating to police officers.

“Having law enforcement act as immigration officials will tear the trust that is already being built in our city and in our county. If there is no trust, that will be a hindrance in reporting crimes, and this keeps police in the dark about crime patterns and what happens in our neighborhoods, and it will make our neighborhood less safe.”

National lawmakers should address comprehensive immigration reform, while state lawmakers need to focus on issues of public safety and public education, said Ogletree, who serves on the board of the Cy-Fair Independent School District.

### **'Moral obligation'**

"Speaking as a minister, we have a moral obligation to make sure no citizen is disenfranchised," Ogletree added, quoting the admonition in Deuteronomy 24:17 not to "pervert justice" by mistreating a resident alien.

SB 185 "could bring strife and turmoil to many communities that are seeking to do their best to create environments of health, safety and prosperity, and we believe this bill will create an atmosphere of mistrust and fear," [said Kathryn Freeman](#), director of public policy for the [Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission](#). "We do support the rule of law and believe it is critical to the orderly functioning of our society, but it is equally important that our laws promote justice and fairness for all."

### **Would create 'atmosphere of distrust'**

The CLC supports immigration reform and border security, Freeman noted, but it opposes SB 185 because it could create an atmosphere of distrust between communities and law enforcement.

"Our churches have been involved in community bridge-building, and we are concerned that all that hard work will be destroyed if SB 185 is passed," she said.

SB 185 could "force into the shadows productive members of our communities," she asserted.

Freeman particularly took aim at a provision that would allow citizens to file a complaint with the state attorney general if they believe local

communities fail to enforce immigration laws to their satisfaction.

“People may be afraid to attend worship services and Bible studies because they fear being picked up by law enforcement,” she said.

### **Turn ‘neighbor against neighbor’**

“We are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, and we believe this bill creates a climate of fear and distrust among neighbors. ... We believe this would turn neighbor against neighbor.”

Abraham Perez, president of the [Alianza Latina Ministerial Austin](#) (Austin Latin Ministerial Alliance) also spoke against SB 185, saying it would open the door to racial profiling and increase family separation.

“If this law were to pass, it will devastate—it will destroy—a lot of families,” Perez said.