

# Voces de la Frontera: Hundreds pack Wisconsin Senate hearing to oppose anti-immigrant bill AB190/SB275

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Madison, Wisconsin – On Thursday, hundreds of Wisconsin residents filled a Senate hearing room, three overflow rooms, and the hallways of the Capitol to oppose the controversial anti-immigrant bill AB190/SB275 (factsheet here). The bill is a copycat of Texas' SB4 and very similar to a bill defeated last year through the Day without Latinxs and Immigrants general strike. The bill would give sweeping powers to local law enforcement and public employees to interrogate, arrest, and deport immigrant community members, and require local law enforcement to comply with unconstitutional ICE detainer requests.

“I have lived here 28 years,” said Eduardo Perea, a member of Voces de la Frontera from Milwaukee (video here). “I run my own business, and I pay taxes. I don’t have a driver’s license, so some may say I am a criminal, but the system makes me a criminal. When I’m driving with my kids, when they see a police car, they pray we don’t get pulled over. That is pure fear, and it hurts more than anything. I am a subcontractor and I have to drive. This bill only increases this fear. We should be debating something else. Wisconsin should welcome hardworking people like the families who are here.”

As of Thursday afternoon, 11 organizations had registered against the Senate bill and 12 against the Assembly companion bill, without a single registration in favor. Organizers urged lawmakers to meet with constituents in their districts to discuss the legislation.

“We oppose this legislation because of the effect it will have to further endanger the lives of domestic violence victims,” said Tony Gibart, Associate Director of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin. “Earlier this year a Wisconsin advocate told us the story of a victim who lives with the father of her two children. After an incident in which her partner strangled her, dragged her by the hair, and threatened to kill her, she sought help from her local domestic abuse program. However, fear of ICE and being deported and separated from her children continues to make her hesitant to report the abuse to law enforcement or seek a restraining order. All across our state, domestic violence programs are reporting dramatic decreases in Latino and immigrant willingness to work with the legal system or even file restraining orders. This legislation, by increasing the fear of arrest and deportation for immigrant survivors, will therefore push victims of crime to the shadows of our society where they are afraid to report violent crimes, making them more vulnerable to victimization and harm.”

“The Catholic Church teaches that every migrant is a human person, who as such possesses fundamental inalienable rights that must be protected by everyone in every circumstance,” said Barbara Sella, Associate Director of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the policy voice of the Wisconsin Catholic bishops. “We urge you to oppose SB275 and instead work with local law enforcement, immigrants and federal authorities to address violent crime, preserve security, and promote the common good.”

Although hundreds of people registered as present or to speak against the bill, three people spoke in favor of the legislation, including a spokeswoman from FAIR, a hate group according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. Senators Nass (R-Elkhorn County) and Wanggaard (R-Racine County) both spoke forcefully in favor of the bill, although both had left by 1pm, hours before testimony ended. Sen. Lasee (Kewaunee County) never appeared at all, though he called in briefly by phone. Community members came to oppose the bill from Walworth County, Manitowoc, Green Bay, Dodgeville, Jefferson County, Racine, Sheboygan, Madison, Milwaukee, and elsewhere.

“Farmers need a stable labor force and business climate, in contrast with the wild swings in immigration policy we’re seeing at the federal level,” said Nick Levendofsky, Government Relations Associate with the Wisconsin Farmers Union. “SB275 will mean that all those swings at the federal level will be the directive for local law enforcement as well. Let’s leave the craziness in Washington and keep some measure of stability and predictability here at home.”

“This bill is racist, unconstitutional, irresponsible, and immoral,” said Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Executive Director of Voces de la Frontera. “Today with only two days notice, hundreds of people have come to oppose this bill. Last year over 40,000 risked their livelihoods or closed their businesses in a general strike to oppose this bill. Why? Because they know this is not theory. They know what this bill opens the door to. And if this bill does move forward, we will not just turn out for one day, but if it takes two days, three days, a weeklong statewide general strike, people are willing to do it to stop this bill. Because we contribute to this state, and we will not just stand by and let our families be separated. We will fight for reach other.”

“I ask you to vote against SB275 because it raises serious constitutional concerns and is wrong for public policy,” said Emmanuel Monroy, Legislative Staff Attorney with the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund, or MALDEF. MALDEF currently represents San Antonio, El Paso, and other cities, counties, and local officials challenging the implementation of SB4 in Texas. “SB275 puts Wisconsin and local governments at risk of litigation and prevents local governments from making the policies that best fit their communities. It would lead to arrests that violate the 4th and 5th amendments to the US Constitution.”