House committee advances legislative crackdown on undocumented immigrants

By Joe Killian

A North Carolina House bill targeting undocumented immigrants charged with crimes, those who make or supply fake IDs and so-called “sanctuary cities” moved closer to becoming law Tuesday.

N.C. House Bill 63 was approved by the House Judiciary II Committee, clearing its first major legislative hurdle.

The final vote was 6-5, reflecting the controversy that has surrounded the bill since it was filed in early February. Tuesday was the third time the Judiciary committee has taken up the bill. Each time experts on immigration law and civil liberties advocates argued against the bill, which also faced scrutiny from both Democratic and Republican members of the committee.

More than a dozen members of the public came to speak again at Tuesday’s meeting but were not allowed. Rep. John Blust (R-Guilford), the committee’s chairman, said enough public comment had been allowed at previous meetings.

On Tuesday several Democrats on the committee reiterated fears that the bill could be unconstitutional. It treats undocumented people differently than other people charged with crimes, they said - and creates a “rebuttable presumption” against releasing them on bail.

They also said it could further harm already fragile relationships between immigrant communities and police, government and even hospitals. Those needing help or even medical treatment may be less likely to reach out for it if they fear harsher treatment because of their immigration status, they said.

The bill’s chief sponsor, Rep. Harry Warren (R-Rowan), said those concerns were misplaced.

The bill creates harsher penalties for those who make or provide fake ID and would withhold a number of different types of state and federal funds from municipalities that do not comply with federal immigration law. [Read more...]

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