

Illegal Alien Ban Tabled

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By: Jeff Shields

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BRIDGEPORT - Borough Council tabled a proposal aimed at barring illegal aliens from working or renting property in Bridgeport.

Borough Councilman Pete Kohut said a recent legal challenge to a ban in the city of Hazleton motivated Tuesday's decision to put off the vote on a proposal.

"I think if (Hazleton) hadn't been sued, we would have moved forward with it," Kohut said.

The municipal council asked Bridgeport's solicitor Sal Bello to review the Hazleton lawsuit and report back to council on Sept. 12.

Councilwoman Juanita Coover raised the issue at a workshop meeting on Aug. 8. At the meeting, Kohut and Councilman John Pizza favored forming a committee to discuss a draft ordinance.

In July, the city of Hazleton and New Jersey's Riverside Township passed measures restricting undocumented individuals from holding jobs or renting property.

The Hazleton ordinance also made English the city's official language.

Previously, Pizza said the Riverside ban hastened the departure of undocumented workers there.

On July 13, Hazleton's City Council passed the Illegal Immigration Relief Act that fines landlords \$1,000 for each illegal alien tenant renting property and has the power to suspend business licenses of those employing undocumented workers.

Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta proposed the legislation in an effort to curb violent crime, overcrowding in schools and hospital emergency departments and the heightened demand for city services.

Kohut worries an influx of illegals would put a similar strain on borough services, and that undocumented residences could avoid paying taxes.

Riverside Township passed a measure similar to Hazleton's on July 26.

On Aug. 15, the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania (ACLU) and several immigration rights groups challenged the Hazleton law on constitutional grounds.

The groups filed the suit on behalf of 11 Hazleton residents and business owners and three nonprofit groups, according to the ACLU's Web site.

The suit claims the ordinance violates the U.S. Constitution's Supremacy Clause, because it seeks to override federal law and the exclusive federal power over immigration.