

Local Groups Say Federal Decision to Strike Down Discriminatory Anti- Immigrant Law in Hazelton Applies to Bridgeport Ordinances

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Local advocacy groups hailed yesterday's federal court decision that held that Hazelton's anti immigrant ordinance is unconstitutional and said it means similar ordinances adopted by the Borough of Bridgeport are also unenforceable.

Last fall the Borough of Bridgeport adopted ordinances which required all tenants to register and prohibited renting to illegal aliens as well as prohibiting employing undocumented workers. Several local groups and community members had threatened to file a lawsuit against the Borough of Bridgeport for its copycat anti-immigrant ordinances. Since that time, Bridgeport has postponed enforcing the ordinances pending the court's decision in Hazelton.

According to Elizabeth Albert, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County, "The federal court's decision to strike down the Hazleton ordinance reinforces our stance that Bridgeport should publicly rescind the three anti- immigrant ordinances it adopted last fall. The ruling should come as a relief to people living and working in Bridgeport who were fearful that they would lose their homes or face fines if the Bridgeport ordinance was enacted."

Bridgeport, a borough in Montgomery County, is one of two dozen Pennsylvania communities who followed Hazelton's lead last year by enacting laws which mimic Hazelton's ordinances. These ordinances sought to punish landlords and employers for doing business with undocumented immigrants. Residents in Bridgeport, especially those who speak Spanish, were concerned that the local laws would lead to discrimination, increased hostility from community members, as well as a loss of housing and employment based upon negative public opinion.

"We welcome this decision and hope that Bridgeport will get the message that their local statute is unconstitutional. The decision makes clear that immigration matters are left to federal jurisdiction not to local governments." says Michael Churchill, Chief Counsel at the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia.

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