

Tennessee Legislature Considers Alabama Copycat Immigration Bill

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Tennessee Republican lawmakers have filed some 30 anti-immigration bills during the current legislative session, according to the [Tennessean](#).

"It'll always be the case that we're trying to make sure that Tennessee is not a magnet for illegals," said state Rep. Debra Maggart (R-Hendersonville), who is the House Republican Caucus chairwoman.

Several of the bills relate to English-only driver licenses. Others focus on prohibiting undocumented immigrants from admission to the University of Tennessee system and requiring jails to report prisoners without U.S. citizenship.



"Surely, Tennessee does not want to follow Alabama's failed anti-immigration law and to use laws to vent hate and justify the mistreatment of others," Robert Parham said.

One bill ([House Bill 2191](#) and Senate Bill 2176) would make it a felony if anyone provided transportation to or harbored an undocumented immigrant.

A Tennessee Immigration and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) press release called that bill an "Alabama copycat bill."

"We need practical solutions for making sense of our immigration laws," said Stephen Fotopulos, TIRRC's executive director, "not destructive, divisive measures that criminalize everyday activities."

In a statement to TIRRC, Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics, said the bill "will penalize clergy and churches for pursuing their God-given responsibility to love their neighbor and to care for the poor through activities such as transporting undocumented immigrants in church vans and providing food, shelter and aid to them."

"This bill will deny people of faith their constitutionally guaranteed right of the free exercise of religious belief," said Parham.

"Fifty years after the era of Jim Crow laws, HB 2191/SB 2176 will take Tennessee down the farm row to Alabama's Juan Crow laws," he added. "Surely, Tennessee does not want to follow Alabama's failed anti-immigration law and to use laws to vent hate and justify the mistreatment of others."

HB 2191 was introduced by state Rep. Tony Shipley (R-Kingsport), a member of Colonial Heights United Methodist Church and a co-chair of Newt Gingrich's presidential campaign in Tennessee.

Shipley [ran](#) on an anti-immigrant platform in 2008.

He [said](#) in 2010: "I am against people breaking our laws. Close our border, take the people who are here

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illegally out of our country."

At an interfaith clergy breakfast last November, Parham [urged](#) some 300 Tennessee faith leaders "to build the moral capital in houses of faith for the coming tsunami of anti-immigration rhetoric and anti-immigration laws."

Last week, some 125 Tennessee faith leaders viewed EthicsDaily.com's documentary [Gospel Without Borders](#) and [heard](#) from a panel of three bishops who urged clergy to oppose mean-spirited legislation targeting undocumented immigrants.

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