

# Valley Interfaith: We decry Gov. Abbott's signing of new anti-immigrant state laws

Frustration over the nation's broken immigration system is allowing the Governor and Texas Legislature to adopt inappropriate and self-defeating strategies like SB 4 and SB 3, argues Valley Interfaith.

BY VALLEY INTERFAITH • GUEST COLUMN, IMMIGRATION • DECEMBER 20, 2023

One week before many Texans celebrate the birth of Jesus, who was poor and a refugee, Governor Abbott signed two laws that will create fear among our immigrant communities and distract our local and state law enforcement from their primary role as protectors of public safety. The constitutionality of these bills will be immediately challenged, but in the meantime millions of Texans can be subjected to racial profiling based on their ethnicity, language ability, dress and location. Local police officers will be asked to become immigration enforcement officers, undermining their ability to develop trusting relationships with immigrant communities who they are asked to protect.

Our immigration system is outdated, and Congress has been unable to update it in decades. As a result, Governor Abbott and his enablers in the Texas Legislature are coming up with ever more questionable ways to spend billions of Texas taxes to militarize border enforcement and criminalize migrants who are fleeing political, religious and criminal violence and persecution in countries across the world. Frustration over our broken

immigration system is allowing the Governor and Texas Legislature to adopt inappropriate and self-defeating strategies like SB 4 and SB 3.

SB 4 will make it a state crime for anyone to cross the Texas-Mexico border between ports of entry. Under the current immigration law, only 1450 people each day can legally cross the US-Mexico border at ports of entry and seek asylum. Many thousands more, fearing the violence and cartels on the Mexico side of the border, choose to cross between ports of entry and immediately turn themselves into border patrol officers and seek asylum. If state and local officers interact before they turn themselves into border patrol, they are liable under SB 4.

Under SB 4, local and state law enforcement officers anywhere in the state can investigate people who appear to be illegal border crossers and require them to produce proof of their right to be in the county. If the person lacks that proof, they can be charged with Class B misdemeanor which carries a punishment of up to six months in jail. If the person has been previously convicted of entering Texas illegally under SB 4, the charge could be increased to a second-degree felony, which carries a punishment of two to 20 years in prison. Under federal law, conviction of a serious misdemeanor or felony can disqualify a person from ever receiving asylum regardless of the merits of their claim. The law also allows Texas magistrates to order a person's deportation without due process.

At a time when our public schools are being starved of funding needed to retain qualified teachers, SB 3 allocates \$1.5 billion to Governor Abbott to use at his discretion for border-related operations. These operations include the funding of a border wall and more razor wire and floating barriers in the Rio Grande, which the Fifth Circuit recently found to be an improper intrusion into federal responsibility. SB 3 was amended in the Special Session to allow Abbott to use part of the \$1.5 billion to give grants to municipal governments that may incur increased costs while enforcing SB 4.