

Don't expand the special session to consider immigration

Dear President Atwater and Speaker Cretul,

We call upon you to resist any efforts to expand the scope of the July 20 - 23 special session for purposes of considering Arizona-style immigration legislation.

The legislation that has been introduced in Florida to mimic the Arizona immigration law is big government, plain and simple. While legislators claim to want less government interference in the personal lives of Floridians, they are poised to consider a law that would -- based on some undefined "reasonable suspicion" of unlawful presence in the country -- end up requiring citizens and non-citizens to prove their citizenship for something that could be as minor as a routine traffic stop.

Instead of turning Florida into a police state where racial profiling is standard operating procedure, legislators should work with members of Congress to fix our broken immigration system and leave the job of immigration enforcement to the federal government, as mandated by the Constitution. Our law enforcement resources are already scarce; we should not be overstepping onto federal responsibilities and diverting limited resources away from law enforcement's primary responsibility of providing protection and promoting public safety in our communities.

This type of law will undoubtedly lead to rampant racial profiling, and it is out of step with American values of fairness and equality. By requiring all law enforcement officials to try to determine citizenship or immigration status if they have an undefined "reasonable suspicion" that someone is in this country unlawfully, this legislation would invite police to rely on appearance and characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and language -- no matter whether the law states that such characteristics should not be used.

The Florida Legislature would do well to steer clear of any such efforts. Please resist any push to expand the scope of the special session in order to consider such proposals.

Thank you.