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SoCal city approves law against renting to illegal immigrants

Associated Press

ESCONDIDO, Calif. - City leaders have given initial approval to an ordinance criminalizing landlords who rent to illegal immigrants, the latest of a handful of cities nationwide to pass laws cracking down on people who hire or rent to undocumented immigrants.

The 3-2 vote followed a three hour debate that was frequently interrupted by shouts from some of the 350 people who filled the City Council chamber. On the lawn outside, hundreds of pro- and anti- illegal immigration activists rallied and watched a live broadcast of the debate on large television screens.

Dozens of police and sheriff's deputies in riot gear stood watch. Several demonstrators had heated exchanges, but no physical altercations occurred and no arrests were made, said Lt. Dave Mankin.

A second vote in two weeks is required for the ordinance to be adopted. If approved, it would take effect 30 days later.

Councilwoman Marie Waldron she said introduced the proposal "to do what we can on the local level" to combat illegal immigration.

"The federal government has let us down by not enforcing our borders," Waldron said.

Mayor Lori Holt Pfeiler and Councilman Ron Newman, the two no votes, said the ordinance would create new problems for Escondido.

"In my opinion, we have divided this community along racial lines," Newman said, arguing the ordinance would be ineffective because it relied on the federal government, which city officials hadn't contacted.

"This thing has been hastily put together," Newman said. "It is not going to be workable."

Under the ordinance, landlords would be required to submit documentation of their tenants' immigration status to the city, which would then submit the information to the federal government for verification.

If tenants are found to be illegal immigrants, landlords would be given 10 days to evict them or face suspension of their business license. Repeat offenders could face misdemeanor charges and fines.

A handful of cities across the country have passed similar ordinances, with local leaders arguing the federal government hasn't done enough to crackdown on the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants living in the country.

Before Wednesday's meeting, a top official with the American Civil Liberties Union threatened legal action against the city if the ordinance was passed.

"The ordinance to be considered is inhumane and unconstitutional. It's just bad public policy, expensive, impractical and will cause Escondido more problems," said ACLU executive director Kevin Keenan.

Hispanics make up 42 percent of Escondido's 142,000 residents.