

Top Mexican official promises funds to provide legal defense to immigrants

Dianne Solis | May 17, 2018

Luis Videgaray, Mexico's foreign relations minister, pledged Wednesday in Dallas that his government will legally defend immigrants against Texas' tough new "sanctuary cities" law.

Mexican immigrants are living in "unprecedented times" with spreading fear and anxiety, Videgaray said. That announcement followed a special meeting among Mexico's 11 Texas consuls on a defense strategy in the state.

The "sanctuary cities" measure, or Senate Bill 4, is now the harshest immigration law in the U.S., legal experts say. It expands local law enforcement power over immigration powers.

"The fear is there and we see it in all its intensity in our consulates," Videgaray said.



Carlos Sada, an undersecretary in Mexico's Foreign Relations Ministry, also attended the Wednesday session on the "sanctuary cities" law. Sada is a former Mexican ambassador to the U.S.

(Ron Baselice/Staff Photographer)

With the election of President Donald Trump and his promised immigration crackdown, Mexican consulates were already expanding hours and offering immigration workshops and a hotline to assist Mexican nationals in the U.S. In early March, the consulates opened up defense centers. The measures were made possible after the Foreign Relations Ministry received a \$50 million budget increase to strengthen consular services in the U.S., said Francisco de la Torre, the Mexican consul in Dallas.

The Mexican government also is considering filing an amicus brief in litigation challenging the new law, Videgaray said. Carlos Gonzalez, the Mexican consul in Austin and the government's point man on Texas legislative issues, confirmed that the government is in talks with the ACLU

and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, or MALDEF. The two civil rights organizations have yet to file against the state of Texas.

In Austin, John Wittman, a spokesman for Gov. Greg Abbott, said “dangerous criminals” will be kept off the streets by the new law.

“To separate the facts from the fiction, this law does not require mandatory immigration checks, it simply prohibits local sheriffs from banning law enforcement officials from inquiry into the immigration status of persons already lawfully detained. Furthermore, witnesses and victims are exempted from the provision, helping ensure they will continue to assist law enforcement efforts.”



Tuesday in Austin, Abbott tried to tamp down fears of racial profiling by emphasizing his wife Cecilia is Mexican-American, in an interview with Univision. “As the husband of the first Hispanic first lady in the state of Texas, I want to make sure that neither she nor her family is gonna be stopped or detained inappropriately,” he said.

At the Dallas Mexican consulate, Videgaray said his staff has received an unspecified number of reports of domestic violence in which immigrant women won’t approach local police for help.

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Women won’t report because of possible immigration actions, he said in Spanish, avoiding the word deportation.

Videgaray also said there were increased reports of racial discrimination since January.



SB4 provisions

The measure, which takes effect Sept. 1, bans cities, counties and universities from prohibiting local law enforcement officers from asking about immigration status or enforcing immigration law. It also calls for local law enforcement to “comply” with “immigration detainer requests” from Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE.

Local governments that don’t

comply can be fined from \$1,000 a day escalating to \$25,500 for subsequent violations. The bill exempts schools, and when dealing with victims or witnesses to crime, it limits the immigration questions.

Mexican migration down

Mexicans make up about half of the country’s 11 million unauthorized immigrants. More Mexicans are leaving than coming to the U.S., and net migration has been at zero in recent years, the Pew Research Center reports.

MALDEF has said the organization will challenge the law and seek to block its enforcement. The civil rights organization has litigated before on immigration matters, frequently raising the constitutional doctrine that federal law pre-empts state law.

In an interview this week, Thomas Saenz, MALDEF’s president and general counsel, said the Texas measure is now the nation’s harshest immigration law, surpassing the severity of the Arizona law known as SB1070.

Large portions of the Arizona law were dismantled in a split decision before the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012. Left undecided, though, was the section called the “show-me-your-papers” provision.

In 2016, the state of Arizona limited the broad authority that local law enforcement agencies had to detain people based on SB1070.