

## Governor Bill Owens' Site

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**OWENS SIGNS IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION CONSIDERED STRONGEST IN THE U.S.*****Governor approves ten bills passed during recent special session***

DENVER - Governor Bill Owens today signed House Bill 1023, requiring applicants for government benefits to prove lawful presence in the United States.

"In a remarkably short period of time, Colorado has moved into the forefront of immigration reform," said Owens. "Several bills passed during the special session will help move the ball forward on this critical issue. Most significantly, House Bill 1023 is considered to be the toughest law in the country dealing with illegal immigration. This legislation will make a positive difference in the future of Colorado," Owens said.

HB 1023 requires government entities in Colorado to verify, through a three-step process, the lawful presence of every adult seeking a government benefit for which citizenship is a requirement.

The process includes producing a secure photo identification (Colorado driver's license, Colorado ID, U.S. military ID, U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner ID, or Native American tribal document); submitting a sworn affidavit; and having the application approved through the SAVE (Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements) program.

Owens pointed out that the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) recently called HB 1023 "a major breakthrough in the fight to control the costs of illegal immigration" and urged other states to follow Colorado's lead. In a letter to the Governor, FAIR concluded that the bill "is significantly stronger than any passed elsewhere in the country to date."

Owens noted that while HB 1023 will apply to many programs, some benefits, such as food stamps and Medicaid, are specifically exempted by federal law.

For food stamps, federal law requires that the identity of an applicant must be verified, but the law also states that "no requirement may be imposed" for a specific type of identification document.

The situation is similar for Medicaid. Under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, individuals who apply for Medicaid or renew their benefits will have to provide documentation of citizenship. However, the list of acceptable forms of identification is far more expansive than Colorado's and the state cannot narrow those requirements.

"States should have the right to require specific forms of identification for such programs. I urge Congress to provide that flexibility and hope that our Congressional delegation will take the lead in proposing those changes." Owens said.

In addition to HB 1023, Owens also signed the following bills passed during the special session:

- HB 1001 - Requires employers to prove that they don't employ illegal immigrants in order to qualify for economic development grants from the state.
- HB 1002 - Exempts, from any prohibition, services involving the identification, testing, prevention or treatment of epidemic or communicable diseases.
- HB 1009 - Requires that government entities issue and renew licenses, permits and similar authorizations only for those lawfully present in the U.S.
- HB 1014 - Directs the Attorney General to pursue all moneys owed by the federal government to Colorado for costs incurred in dealing with illegal immigration.
- HB 1015 - Requires employers to withhold state income tax from workers who do not have a valid taxpayer ID number and whose wages are reported on Form 1099.
- HB 1017 - Obligates employers to document their compliance with federal employment verification requirements.
- SB 4 - Protects immigrants from forms of extortion.
- SB 5 - Protects immigrants from coercion involving involuntary servitude.
- SB 7 - Makes voting illegally in an election a Class 5 Felony.

Owens expressed some disappointments regarding the special session. He stressed that lawmakers did not establish a verifiable identification process in order to vote or for obtaining employment in Colorado. Lawmakers also failed to impose strict timelines on the State Supreme Court for rulings involving citizen initiatives

He also said he was disappointed that citizens would not have the chance to express their views on illegal immigration policies to be followed by the state in the future. "This is something I preferred at the beginning of the session and is still something I wish we had been able to accomplish," Owens said.

Overall, though, the Governor expressed satisfaction at the accomplishments made during the special session. "The goal is to stem the tide of illegal immigrants coming into our state," said Owens. "Fortunately, in a bi-partisan effort, we have been able to take meaningful action."

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