

## Group offers protection from immigration law abuse

By LORI RODRIGUEZ  
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Barely two months after passage of sweeping changes to the U.S. immigration law, some of Houston's leading Latinos have banded together to protect illegals and Hispanic-Americans from abuses — already reported here — under its provisions.

Besides complaints against employers who have either fired or refused to hire workers they believed were illegals, said attorney Isaias Torres, there have been reports of illegals being deported who might have qualified for amnesty under the new law.

"There are abuses occurring that are causing us to come forward," said Torres.

At a Wednesday news conference at the Mexican Consulate here, Torres and Leonel Castillo, former commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and now president of Houston International University, spoke on behalf of the newly formed Hispanic Advisory Council on the New Immigration Law.

The broad-based council will try to provide accurate and thorough information on the new law to those who might be affected by its provisions.

Council members at the news conference included the consul generals of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia and Honduras; attorneys Ellis Barrera, Jr., and Frumencio Reyes, and Lupe Salinas, a former state district judge.

Also represented in the council are Ripley House community center, the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce, Houston Community College,

Stanaker Public Library, the Comité Patriótico Mexicano and Centro Texano de Ayuda Para Inmigrantes, an immigration counseling center.

According to a formal Declaration of Principles, the purposes of the group include:

"To ensure that social, human and labor rights of every undocumented person in our community are scrupulously respected" and "To advise employers on the responsibilities that the law confers upon them, in order to avoid unjustified loss of employment by undocumented workers and discrimination of those who are already legal residents."

In California, the new law has prompted a class-action suit and injunction against the INS forbidding the deportation of illegals who might have a claim to amnesty and, locally, immigration attorneys predict a spate of related lawsuits against other abuses.

"There's simply a conflict between some of the provisions of the new law and basic, constitutional liberties," said Reyes. "We know it's going to be used against Latinos, and we know we're going to have to take legal action to correct some of its inequities."

Also Wednesday, Houston City Councilman Ben Reyes told his colleagues the city has on several recent occasions asked only Hispanic job applicants to show proof of citizenship.

"I think we are in violation of the law," Reyes said. "The city may find itself with a big lawsuit."

City administrators said personnel employees had been told to request proof of citizenship from all applicants, but Reyes said, "Maybe they didn't get the message. If they didn't, somebody needs to get it to them."