

ACLU Helps Strike Down Discriminatory Anti-Immigrant Law in Hazleton, Pennsylvania



Watch *Lozano v. Hazleton* plaintiff Rudy Espinal tell his story at <http://stream.luxmedia501.com/?file=/clients/aclu/freedomfiles/immigration2.wmv&type=wmv>.

On July 26, 2007, the ACLU won a landmark decision striking down an anti-immigrant local ordinance in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. This harmful ordinance, enacted in July 2006, sought to punish landlords and employers for doing business with undocumented immigrants. Supporters of the law had clearly stated that their goal was to drive so-called “illegal aliens” out of town. Many Hispanics, including legal U.S. residents, have left Hazleton, and Hispanic-owned businesses have had to close down because of the hostile environment created by the ordinance. We brought this lawsuit on behalf of Hazleton residents, landlords, and business owners, in collaboration with the ACLU of Pennsylvania, the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Community Justice Project, and the law firm of Cozen O’Connor.

This ruling strikes a hard blow to the anti-immigrant movement, as it is the most comprehensive decision in the country to date. In the words of Judge Munley: “We cannot say clearly enough that persons who enter this country without legal authorization are not stripped immediately of all their rights because of this single act ... The United States Supreme Court has consistently interpreted [the 14th Amendment] to apply to all people present in the United States, whether they were born here, immigrated here through legal means, or violated federal law to enter the country.”

During the two-week trial, Hazleton officials claimed that undocumented immigrants are responsible for an increase in local crime. But evidence at trial rejected that claim and showed that over the last 30 years, undocumented immigrants have had the lowest incarceration rate of young men of every ethnic group.

The ACLU is closely monitoring other cities and towns that are considering or have enacted similar ordinances to Hazleton’s, and has initiated several related legal challenges with success to date. We are hopeful that this ruling will discourage municipalities around the country from passing similar ordinances.

For more information, please visit www.aclu.org/hazleton.