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## Immigration law prompts union push

Phoenix Business Journal - by [Mike Sunnucks](#)

Labor unions are using Arizona's new immigrant trespassing law to bolster their organizing efforts among Hispanic workers.

Union representatives say they are seeing a surge in inquiries from Hispanic workers in Arizona worried about the new law and the potential for more police raids and inquiries into their workplaces.

"We are getting more calls," said Scott Washburn, state director of the [Service Employees International Union](#). SEIU has about 4,000 members in Arizona, mostly in the public sector.

Washburn wouldn't provide specific details on any organizing efforts or which sectors SEIU is getting calls from in the wake of Gov. Jan Brewer signing Senate Bill 1070 into law. The measure gives police broad powers to question and arrest illegal immigrants on misdemeanor trespassing charges. Washburn acknowledged that the new law and the anti-immigrant mood in Arizona is increasing workers' interest in unions.

"They want some protection to be able to counteract some of this stuff," he said.

Washburn would not disclose what percentage of SEIU members are Hispanic versus other ethnicities. He said the union does not ask potential members to prove their legal status.

[Arizona AFL-CIO](#) Director Rebekah Friend said the immigration debate and the law are encouraging Hispanic workers to look at organizing and becoming more involved politically.

"The more downward pressure you put on workers, the more likely they are to join a union," she said.

Employment attorneys confirmed the law is making Arizona a target for a number of unions looking to organize workers in the construction and service sectors.

"They've stepped it up big-time," said Julie Pace, an immigration and labor attorney with the Cavanagh Law Firm in Phoenix.

Pace said Hispanic workers are scared of the immigration sentiment and worried they will be discriminated against by the police and by employers worried about workplace raids.

She said unions are going after industries with substantial Latino work forces, such as services and construction. Thirty percent of Arizona and Maricopa County's population is Hispanic, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Arizona has right-to-work laws that limit union organizing in the state. In 2009, only 6.5 percent of Arizona workers were union members, compared with a 12.3 percent national average, according the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The recession also has reduced union membership in Arizona, from 227,000 workers in 2008 to 162,000 in 2009, according to BLS.

Nationwide, 10.2 percent of Hispanic workers are union members, compared with 12.1 percent of whites and 13.9 percent of blacks. BLS reports Hispanic women have the lowest unionization rate in the U.S., at 9.7 percent. Black men had the highest rate, at 15.4 percent.

John Lomax, an employment attorney with the Phoenix law office of Greenberg Traurig LLP, said unions long have wanted to make inroads in Arizona.

"Several unions, Unite Here and SEIU, have harbored desires to build a presence among lower-wage service industries, such as commercial janitor services, hospitality and resorts," Lomax said. "Expect to see these and other unions join the political debate in Arizona — and, if they find the right opportunity, they will pursue organizing."

#### BY THE NUMBERS

##### Maricopa County:

- Population: 3.9M
- Hispanic population: 1.2M
- Ratio: 30 percent

##### Arizona:

- Population: 6.3M
- Hispanic population: 1.9M
- Ratio: 30 percent

##### Arizona unions, 2009:

- Labor force: 2.5M
- Union members: 162,000
- Ratio: 6.5 percent

##### National union membership:

- Hispanic: 10.2%
- Caucasian: 12.1%
- Black: 13.9%

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics and U.S. Census Bureau