

State lawmakers to review law targeting injured undocumented workers

By: Ryan Smith

A Florida legislator is promising a review of a state law that allows insurers and employers to turn in injured undocumented workers for deportation rather than pay workers' compensation claims.

An investigation by NPR and ProPublica found that almost 800 undocumented workers in Florida have been charged with workers' comp fraud, even though more than 560 never filed workers' comp claims. An additional 130 suffered workplace injuries but were denied benefits and prosecuted.

State Sen. Anitere Flores (R), the chair of the Banking and Insurance Committee, has promised a legislative review of the law that allows that to happen.

"Legitimate injuries shouldn't be denied just because the person was an undocumented immigrant," Flores told ProPublica.

Flores said she was particularly disturbed by companies that hired undocumented workers knowing that the fear of prosecution and deportation might keep them from filing claims if they were injured on the job.

"That's borderline unconscionable," she said.

Like most states, Florida provides workers' comp benefits to undocumented immigrants. But the state's law was amended in 2003 to make the use of false identification in obtaining jobs and workers' comp a felony, ProPublica reported. Dennis Jay, executive director of the Coalition Against Insurance Fraud, said that some insurance companies are using the law to deny the claims of legitimately injured people.

"I don't see how they can legally justify that," Jay told ProPublica. "It also paints

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