

Ala. governor rejects bishops' immigration plea

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (RNS) Gov. Robert Bentley won't support a repeal of the state's get-tough immigration law, rejecting a Christmas appeal from a group of top religious leaders.

"Gov. Bentley believes Alabama needs an effective illegal immigration law because the federal government has failed in its duties to enforce the law," wrote Bentley's press secretary, Jennifer Ardis, in an email.

A half-dozen religious leaders on Tuesday (Dec. 20) delivered a letter to Bentley's office asking him, in the spirit of the Christmas season, to support the repeal of the law, which one bishop called one of the nation's "meanest."

The religious leaders -- including the state's Episcopal, Catholic and United Methodist bishops and others -- are part of a lawsuit that was filed against the state this summer seeking to have the immigration law overturned.

"In this time when we celebrate the greatest of gifts, we pray that you will show great political courage and leadership and support the repeal of this unfortunate legislation that has brought such heartache to our state," the letter said.

Short of a repeal, the letter asks for "much-needed revisions to an unjust and unfair law." Religious leaders have vigorously opposed parts of the law that make it illegal

to help undocumented immigrants; several portions of the law are currently under review in federal court.

"People of faith must be free to exercise their religious beliefs in loving their neighbors, whoever they are, without fear of persecution or prosecution," the letter states.

Ardis said Bentley -- a former Southern Baptist deacon -- remains convinced that "there is nothing unkind, unjust or unwarranted about asking everyone in Alabama to obey the law."