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## **Immigrants Demand More Protections in NJ**

But lawmakers not expected to take up two key bills until after election in November  
Brenda Flanagan

Advocates rallied outside the State House in Trenton Monday, trying to focus lawmakers' attention on immigrant justice bills that have languished in the Legislature. Speakers promoted measures to enhance language access and privacy protections regardless of someone's immigration status. "...there aren't sufficient protections to keep New Jersey from voluntarily helping ICE or collecting information that can fall into the hands of the federal immigration enforcement," said Eric Cruz Morales of the Alliance for Immigrant Justice.

Advocates support the Values Act, which would bar state, county or municipal officials from stopping, questioning, arresting, searching or detaining any individual based on actual or suspected immigration status. Former state Attorney General Gurbir Grewal already directed law enforcement to follow similar guidelines. The Values Act would extend it to social services, said Adam McGovern of Wind of the Spirits. He said, "We had at least one member who, once they moved to the community, never enrolled their kids in school, period, because they were afraid of being gotten by ICE and taken away from their kid." He said its why many immigrants hide in the shadows.

Democrats drafted both the Values Act and the Language Access Bill, which would require state government to make vital documents available in the 15 most common non-English languages in New Jersey. Families who do not always speak English as a first language "struggle to get their rights met in these places," said Tara Szymanek of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network.

"We are tired of being told that our communities already receive enough. We're tired of being told services and programs for our communities are too complicated," said Amy Torres of the New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice. With lawmakers facing budget votes and political campaigns, neither bill is expected to move until the post-election lame-duck session.