

Value of immigrants to state is stressed

By Deborah Yetter

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FRANKFORT, Ky. -- Adopting the slogan "Love Thy Neighbor," advocates for immigration and refugee rights capped off a morning of lobbying lawmakers with a press conference at the Capitol.

"It is important for immigrants and refugees to get involved in the legislative process," said moderator Isela Arras, a staff member with the Kentucky Domestic Violence Association. "Unless we get involved we have no right to complain."

Several speakers stressed the value of immigrants and refugees to the state's culture and economy, including Adnan Raffiudin, 28, of Lexington, who came to the United States from Bangladesh at age 8 when his mother won a Fulbright scholarship to study at Indiana University.

His parents eventually won citizenship -- but because it took so long, Raffiudin was too old to be considered a dependent and has to reapply on his own.

Raffiudin graduated from college in Indiana and said he wants to remain in the United States and contribute to the state.

"I have been willing to share the best parts of me to make Kentucky my home," said Raffiudin, who is working for the domestic violence association as an intern.

Earlier in the day, about 50 participants visited lawmakers to hand out information packets on immigration and refugee issues and to discuss their concerns.

Among them is House Bill 304, which would have Kentucky take over many of the immigration enforcement duties that are supposed to be performed by the federal government.

The bill is pending before the House Judiciary Committee, which has not yet voted on it.

Many immigration and refugee rights advocates oppose HB 304 as too restrictive and instead support an overhaul of the federal system.

"It doesn't make sense for the state to take on enforcement," said Richard Seckel, director of the Kentucky Equal Justice Center in Lexington.

Jose Neil Donis, publisher of the *Al Dia en America*, a Spanish newspaper in Louisville, said many immigrants are worried about the current debate and the hostility they sense from some in the debate.

Yesterday's event was an effort to improve communication with lawmakers as well as the public, he said.

"To me the main thing is to build a relationship with the legislators," he said. "The Latino community seems to be an unknown thing to many people."

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