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Group says immigration law failing to reduce unemployment

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Analysis of recent jobs numbers disproves the claims of those asserting that Alabama's new anti-immigration law is responsible for putting Alabamians to work says Citizen's Arise Policy Project.

Although the state's unemployment rate did improve by half a percentage point from September to October – from 9.8 percent to 9.3 percent – that bit of good news is tempered by the fact that it was primarily a result of fewer people looking for work they say.

The tiny uptick in unemployment numbers shows that only 3,578 more Alabamians were working in October than in September. But the unemployment rate doesn't count people who have given up on finding a job, dropping out of the labor force altogether. In fact, the recent data show that Alabama's "civilian labor force" dropped by 6,258 during the same period.

"We're talking about a small bump up in a small sample of data," said ACPP policy analyst Stephen Stetson. "And the numbers look better than they are because they don't account for people who have either left the state or just quit looking for work altogether."

"Anybody looking at the unemployment rate alone to get a feel for what's happening in Alabama is making a big mistake," Stetson said. "People who've given up on getting a job are still having a big impact on the economic landscape."

Proponents of HB 56 were quick to credit the anti-immigration statute with boosting hiring. However, the figures released by the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations also reflect annual increases in seasonal hiring for the holidays.

"We've got a long way to go before we can accurately measure the effects on Alabama's labor market of running off a population of low-income workers," Stetson said. "It will be January before temporary holiday hires are let go and February at the earliest before we can get an accurate snapshot of employment."

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