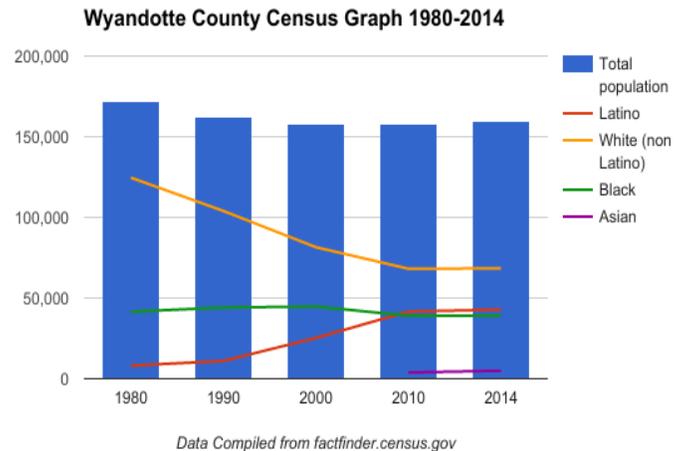


Testimony in Opposition to SB 157 and SB 158
Prepared for Kansas Senate Committee
by Reverend P. Jarrett Meek of Kansas City, KS

I am writing to express my opposition to SB 157 and SB 158. As a native-born Kansan, resident of Wyandotte County, and a Republican, I am concerned that our state and local law enforcement resources might be used to aid in the enforcement of federal immigration laws, to our own harm. As an Evangelical pastor who works extensively with the immigrant community in Kansas City, KS through Mission Adelante, I am deeply grieved by the human toll that overly harsh policies may take on families. And, forcing our state and local law enforcement officers into an adversarial relationship with a high percentage of our community would undermine public safety for all and jeopardize the very people who are helping revitalize our city.

I live in an urban area of Wyandotte County where immigrants are literally saving our community from economic disaster. From 1980 through 2010, over 56,000 white residents (nearly 33% of the entire population) moved out of Wyandotte County. Such a dramatic exodus should have severe economic consequences: business closings, school closings, vacant housing, plummeting property values, loss of property and sales tax revenue, etc. However, a decade after the white exodus began, Latino immigrants began to arrive. During the same period, the Latino population in the county increased by nearly 34,000 or 414%, effectively offsetting the white population decline. New businesses have opened, fewer houses are vacant, property values are increasing, crime is decreasing.

Perhaps the biggest icon of positive immigrant impact in our community is Prescott Plaza. In 2008, propelled by the immigration boom in our area, Chas Ball Grocery store relocated from its smaller space at 19th and Central to become the anchor of a new commercial development that would replace an abandoned truck stop and sketchy motel at 18th Street and I-70. Today, Prescott Plaza is a thriving economic center!

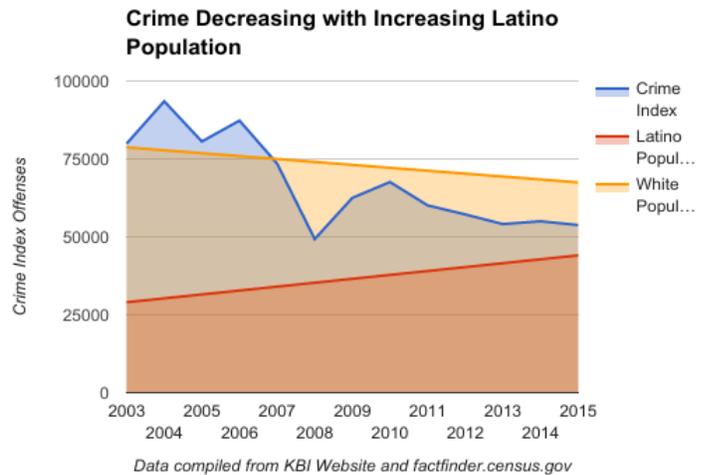


Common anti-immigrant rhetoric suggests that immigrants are a drain on resources. However, studies show that immigrants start businesses, create jobs, and support our economy, occupy and repair blighted homes, pay property taxes, sales taxes, employment taxes, and income taxes.¹ “According to the Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity, ‘immigrants were more than twice as likely to start businesses each month in 2010 than were the native-born.’”² We must ask ourselves what would have happened to Wyandotte County if immigrants had not filled the gap that was being left by so many white residents leaving between 1980 and 2014. The answer is evident: urban Wyandotte County would be a ghost town.

¹ <https://newrepublic.com/article/122714/immigrants-dont-drain-welfare-they-fund-it>

² https://www.uschamber.com/sites/default/files/documents/files/Immigration_MythsFacts.pdf

Not many people object to deporting undocumented people who have committed violent crimes. However, national studies show that “immigrants commit fewer crimes, on average, than native-born Americans”³. Data from the KBI website shows that crime in Wyandotte County decreased by 31% from 2003 to 2015, while the Latino population increased by 48% in that same period. “The most common explanation [for this] is that immigration reduces levels of crime by revitalizing urban neighborhoods, creating vibrant communities and generating economic growth.”⁴ With this in mind, reducing crime cannot be used as a rational



justification for increasing deportations. However, the Trump administration uses this reason while broadening the scope of priorities for deportation to include many people who are not violent criminals at all. We must ask ourselves if participating in this mass deportation effort is really in Kansas’ best interests and if it’s really something for which we want to own responsibility (financial, economic, or moral).

President Trump’s Executive Order on Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States suggests, by its name, that it is about public safety, but it broadens its enforcement priorities to include people who aren’t a threat to public safety at all.

Sec. 5 Enforcement Priorities. In executing faithfully the immigration laws of the United States, the Secretary of Homeland Security (Secretary) shall prioritize for removal those aliens described by the Congress ... as well as removable aliens who:

- "(a) Have been convicted of any criminal offense;
- "(b) Have been charged with any criminal offense, where such charge has not been resolved;
- "(c) Have committed acts that constitute a chargeable criminal offense;
- "(d) Have engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter or application before a governmental agency;
- "(e) Have abused any program related to receipt of public benefits;
- "(f) Are subject to a final order of removal, but who have not complied with their legal obligation to depart the United States; or
- "(g) In the judgment of an immigration officer, otherwise pose a risk to public safety or national security."⁵

The relationship between law enforcement officers and the communities they protect and serve is a critical partnership. Community members report crimes, cooperate with investigations, mentor youth, and teach their kids to respect authorities. When local law enforcement officers are forced into an adversarial relationship with the communities they serve, it is a lose-lose proposition. Preventing crime becomes more difficult and residents become fearful of the very officers that are charged with their protection. It is my strong belief that SB 157 and SB 158 would undermine the overall safety of our communities and would create a hostile environment for the very people who are driving revitalization and a decrease in crime in the communities in which they live. Please vote “no” on SB 157 and SB 158.

³ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/immigrants-do-not-increase-crime-research-shows/>

⁴ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/immigrants-do-not-increase-crime-research-shows/>

⁵ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/01/25/presidential-executive-order-enhancing-public-safety-interior-united-states>