

Melissa Stiehler
Resident of Topeka, Kansas
Opponent Testimony of HB2717
For the House Federal and State Affairs Committee

March 15, 2022

Chair Barker and Members of the Committee,

Thank you so much for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am a resident of Topeka, Kansas and I am deeply opposed to HB 2717, which would ban our local government from enacting Safe and Welcoming policies within our community. Enacting this law would be government overreach, while banning a policy that helps make our cities safer and our communities healthier.

It should not be the legislature's place to require our local police departments to take on the role of a federal immigration agent, which is exactly what this law does. A safe and welcoming policy lets the police do the police's job, which should be focused on solving crimes. By requiring the police to take on an additional unfunded burden which should be reserved for a federal agency of tracking down and deporting immigrants who are not criminals, you actually make our communities less safe by wasting the resources of our local police departments and deterring immigrants and their families from reporting when they are the victims of crimes due to fear of deportation.

This doesn't just impact the undocumented community, but all of us. Many families in Kansas are "mixed status" families which include people with different levels of documentation. Those families are a part of our community. In fact, 1 in 14 Kansans are foreign born, but they are Kansans now. They make up nearly 10% of Kansas's workforce, and study after study show they pay their fair share in taxes. They are our neighbors and friends. They attend our churches and schools. They are Kansans. Furthermore, harsh policing of immigrant communities often times leads to increased racial profiling. This is a harmful practice to encourage in our police force and will continue to drive a wedge between members of our community and our local police.

Lastly, police doing the work of immigration agents doesn't benefit our communities or deter crime. You can look to Dodge City and Garden City as examples of seeing how this plays out. They are similar communities in terms of size, economic conditions, immigration populations, etc. but Garden City police contracts with ICE to work as immigration agents, while Dodge City doesn't. They have nearly identical crime rates. In Dodge City, the violent crime rate is 4.46 per 1,000 residents and in Garden City it is 4.94 per 1,000 residents. This police/immigration agent hybrid model doesn't make for safer communities. There's no benefit of this policy. Meanwhile, the Lawrence police department enacted a safe and welcoming policy and it is a perfectly safe community.

In closing, I ask you to please vote no on HB2717, and instead support our local governments and police departments to enact whatever policy they know to be best for their community. Thank you all for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration.