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Testimony by Monsignor Stuart W. Swetland In Opposition to HB2717
House Fed and State Committee, Rep. John Barker, Chair
March 15, 2022

Good morning. My name is Msgr. Stuart W. Swetland. I am a resident of Wyandotte County and a lifelong Republican, the proud son of a businessman father who ran for office as a Republican. I currently serve as the seventh president of Donnelly College and the pastor of Our Lady and St. Rose Catholic Church, Kansas City.

I am here today representing Kansas Interfaith Action, where I serve on the board of directors. KIFA is a statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit issue-advocacy organization that represents people of faith and the public on a variety of important social and economic justice issues.

Donnelly College (Go Dragons!) has been named by *US News and World Report* as the most diverse college in the Midwest for the past five years. From Ohio to Colorado, from Oklahoma to the Canadian border, the most diverse college is found in Kansas City, KS. This is because we serve a very wonderful, diverse community from the greater Kansas City area. As I tell our supporters from the east and west coasts: when you think of diversity, think of Kansas.

I testify in opposition to HB 2717. I do so for three reasons.

1. We should value and respect local decision-making in government.
2. Because our immigration laws and system are badly broken and we refuse to address the need for comprehensive immigration reform on the national level, local communities need to be able to craft commonsense local remedies that mitigate the worst effects of a broken system on local communities, businesses, families, and individuals.
3. The safe and welcoming legislation passed in Wyandotte County will make our county safer and improve economic development, by allowing everyone to participate and to feel able to seek police help without fear of their families or themselves being adversely affected by the dysfunctional immigration system.

We, the citizens of Wyandotte County, have been working for five years in cooperation with our local United Government, our police and sheriff's offices, and numerous civic and faith organizations to pass this much-needed legislation. Local elections for mayor and county council have been held with the "Safe and Welcoming" act as one of the central issues. The people of Wyandotte County have made a prudential judgment about what is best for our community and what serves the common good.

What does Safe and Welcoming do and why was it needed? First, Safe and Welcoming allows for a municipal ID card that will facilitate local economic activity. When I served as head of the Newman

Foundation at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, I was involved with the not-for-profit that provided municipal IDs. These had an immediate positive economic impact for the community. At first, one city (Urbana) accepted them while the other (Champaign) did not. The negative economic effect on Champaign was so notable and so severe that, within weeks, Champaign also voted to accept the identification. Local municipal identification can facilitate local social and economic activity.

Second, as a college president I have seen first-hand the hesitancy of individuals who have been victims of criminal activity to access help from or report to the civil authorities and police, fearing for themselves or a member of their extended family due to an immigration issue. This hesitancy is dangerous for the victims (some of whom are targeted as victims for this reason) and for the greater community. All residents, no matter their immigration status, should feel safe in interacting with local police, in reporting and fighting against crime. This provision serves the common good.

As a life-long Republican, I know it is a central tenet of the Republican political philosophy to believe in federalism, small government, and local control. In Catholic social thought we call this the principle of subsidiarity—that larger, more distant institutions ought not interfere or replace smaller, more local institutions unless the local institutions are incapable of self-help.

This Republican belief was reiterated numerous times in the latest Republican platform (2020). For example, the platform professed: “We encourage states to reinvigorate their traditional role as the laboratories of democracy, propelling the nation forward through local and state innovation

HB 2717 violates these Republican principles. The Kansas state government ought not wrest local control on issues and governance that can be handled on a local level. Local governments, county officials, school boards, and sporting associations ought to be left to administrate local jurisdiction.

Please stand on your principles of limited government and local control. Please allow Wyandotte County residents the right to self-rule and the hope for all residents to be safe and welcomed in our communities. Please vote no on HB 2717.

Thank you for listening to my testimony. I will be happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.