

Greetings everyone and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to share testimony here today.

Data from the 2020 census has shown us that Kansas faced a shrinking population in 80 out of 105 counties in the past decade. The population that we do have is becoming increasingly concentrated in only a select few areas, leaving many rural parts of the state with a bad need for workers, a shortage only compounded by the effects of the Great Resignation and pandemic.

Many in this chamber love to wax poetic about the wonders of the free market, but from where I am standing, it all rings hollow because to me, it doesn't seem like Kansas is even interested in competing at all.

Many of these rural areas that would benefit the most from the growth of immigrant communities are those out West, closest to the Colorado border. Colorado as an entire state is a sanctuary for the very people who Kansas is trying to make unwelcome which will provide them with enough incentive to simply leave, to go where they are going to be made to feel safe, and you can't blame anyone for making that very obvious choice.

It disappoints me as a proud lifelong Kansan that we only ever want to handout of incentives for big business executives in the form of tax cuts, but never give incentives to the little guy in the form of open arms and a helping hand. It's the carrot for the rich, and the stick for everyone else.

This bill is also a major affront to the idea of self-governance and local autonomy. If these communities have found a system that is working for them and that they like, one that is clearly keeping everyone safe, then why should this body in Topeka get to take that away from them? Until there is an actual problem to point to, our default should really just be to leave well enough alone. These immigrant communities are not a threat to us. This legislation, however, is a threat to them.

These debates are stigmatizing to a group of people who is more likely to be hurt than to hurt others. Think back to the 2016 Garden City bomb plot. Every time this debate heats up on the national stage, the cruel debate of whether or not people are people, immigrant communities are threatened, harassed, and even attacked. I assure you of this: dealing with an uptick in blatant white supremacist violence will do far more to complicate the FBI and law enforcement's job than anything this bill wishes to fix.

Lastly, the whole point of these local tools of identification and less frequent federal contact is to show immigrant communities that they have a home here, a home that everyone should take ownership of. That is what builds prosocial connections: trust. But trust that is demanded by authority and never given back to the people is not trust at all, that is simply called aggression and tyranny.

I urge you all to oppose HB2717 to protect the economic interests of rural West Kansas, to prove that we can compete with the rest of the country, to stand up for the little guy, to preserve local autonomy, to stop hate, and to build community trust. Thank you.