

HOUSE FEDERAL AND STATE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

BILL NUMBER: HB 2717

Oppose ___X___

Testimony Will Be: In Person Oral _____ Webex Oral Written

For Meeting on _____ March 29th at 8:30 am _____

Testimony By: **Karla Juarez**_____
(Name of person testifying)

On Behalf Of: Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation

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To: Senate Federal & State Affairs Committee
Senator. Robert Olson, Chairman

From: Karla Juarez
Re: HB 2717

Chairman Olson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Karla Juarez, a Johnson County KS resident and the Executive Director for Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation (AIRR). My organization was one of the many organizations that formed the Safe and Welcoming coalition. I am writing to share that we strongly oppose HB 2717 because it will decrease crime reporting and cause a negative economic impact in our state.

As someone who worked with the legal department to draft the final version of the Safe and Welcoming ordinance in Wyandotte, let me explain what the ordinance does. The Safe and Welcoming Act does not ban cooperation with federal immigration authorities if the public safety is at risk, criminal activity or a judicial warrant exist. What the Safe and Welcoming ordinance does is set boundaries and clear guidelines as to what level of cooperation a municipality should have with federal agencies like ICE, but in no way does it prohibit that cooperation. Everyone must be held accountable to our justice system.

The ordinance exists so community members can feel safe reporting crime. The Safe and Welcoming City act tells local law enforcement to not ask for immigration status when encountering a victim of a crime, unless the status is related to the crime being committed.

I testify before you with personal and professional experience with the immigration process, and I can tell you that when an individual is a victim of a crime and happens to be undocumented, it scares them and in turn, the crime committed goes unreported. I know that local law enforcement, in charge of everyone's safety, asks for an ID when someone reports a crime. Our community needs to feel safe contacting the police department and needs to know that their families will not be separated because they were trying to do the right thing. The safe and welcoming ordinance ensures this and empowers our immigrant community to come forward in reporting crime. It is beneficial for local law enforcement agencies to have a Municipal ID that they recognize in identifying area residents involved in local public safety issues. Part of our work to pass Safe and Welcoming Wyandotte allowed us to speak to thousands of Wyandotte residents and there was an overwhelming support and need for this ordinance. One issue highlighted was the lack of crime reporting. Stories like- a family member's car being broken into and declined to call the police because of fear of being asked for an ID or immigration status- was mentioned to us.

During the House Federal and State affairs committee hearings regarding this bill, there was a question from a Representative on how this bill can affect the state's economic competitiveness. Let me explain why, Kansas is home to many mixed status families which means at least one member of the family is currently undocumented. This bill will, in fact, create fear amongst mixed status families and will cause documented workers to leave Kansas with their families. This will worsen our current labor shortage.

I have heard, "wait in line" or "do it the right way" when referring to obtaining legal status. Well, some are waiting, I did, I waited 10 long years to become a US citizen and exercise my right to vote. Individuals waiting "in line" need ID's to access basic needs like, going to the doctor, picking up their prescription medication, enrolling their children in school among other basic things.. The Safe and Welcoming Wyandotte municipal ID program is an inclusive ordinance that benefits, not just immigrants, but the elderly, previously incarcerated, children aging out of the foster care system and houseless individuals.

Furthermore, as a Kansas resident myself, I appreciate that local governments respond to local needs and state be left out of decisions like this one.

I appreciate your time and consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Karla Juarez
Karla@airrk.org
Executive director, AIRR