

Testimony for HB-2717

Good Morning. My name is Jose Cabrera, but I go by Pepe. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of this bill.

I feel uniquely qualified to discuss this topic. You see, my parents are Cuban refugees. My father was thrown in political prison for speaking out against the Castro regime... WHEN HE WAS ONLY 16! He was released after several months... he refused to remain silent about the direction his beloved homeland was headed... and he fled to the United States after catching wind he was being hunted for having the audacity of disagreeing with Castro.

A few years later, my grandparents put my mother and her sister on the boats coming to America for Operation Peter Pan. She was only 14. My parents met at the port... and because of that, I am here today... and forever thankful.

Beyond the story of their journey to America... my parents settled in the heart of Wyandotte County... growing up near the Parallel exit off 635. So not only am I the son of refugees... Kansas City is my hometown... and where I live now after years of military service.

I tell you the story of my parents' journey to the United States of America for a couple of reasons... 1) that I am incredibly sensitive to the immigration debate that has come to the fore within the last decade... and 2) that I want to make abundantly clear... that I am unequivocally and unapologetically PRO-IMMIGRATION. People who come to this country for whatever reason... all share a desire to make a better life for themselves and their families. Whether it be to become a permanent citizen, or to legally contribute to our labor force on a temporary basis, my devotion to this issue cannot and will not be challenged.

My hope is that EVERY city is "Safe & Welcoming." However, there is a caveat to this phrase that cannot be ignored... that all the efforts to make cities "Safe & Welcoming" should also work uphold the law... not work to circumvent it.

We absolutely do need Common Sense immigration reform... and we need to build it upon three pillars. 1) That the process is simple and quick, 2) that it is inexpensive for the applicants, and most importantly... 3) that it is secure. Whether people are coming here to live permanently or as temporary workers, we are a nation of laws. This situation is no exception.

Cities creating local policies that circumvent federal law may come from a right hearted place, but the 2nd and 3rd order effects on both the city AND the immigrants are more problematic when you are able to peel away the rhetoric and emotion from the issue for a closer look. I'm certain that hours will be spent within this committee and in the house on those effects... so I won't spend time during my remarks here discussing them... other than to say that I am Pro-Immigration... that these local policies are not legal protection from County, State or Federal authorities... AND that I support any bill working to preserve the rule of law.