

Federal and State Affairs Committee
Testimony Opposing HB2717
March 15, 2022
Sister Therese Bangert
Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

Good Morning Chairman Barker and Committee,

I am Sister Therese Bangert a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth. I like to remind legislators that our pioneer Sisters landed in Leavenworth in 1858. We began serving the people of Kansas before it even became a state.

I am glad that this Committee has the morning hour because you get some tough assignments. And this morning is one of them. Immigration.

All of us when coming into the room this morning – people in the gallery, legislative staff and those of you on the Committee – all of us had to walk by the beautiful mural on Brown vs Board. That mural, for me, is such a powerful depiction of a struggle in our country – the struggle to live up to the Constitution – “ALL are created equal”. Kansas through Brown v Board was a leader in the struggle. Families here in Topeka took risks to stand up for human rights. The mural depicts numerous faces – smiling faces as well as disturbing faces of hatred and fear.

HB2717 seems to have born out of a concern for the Safe & Welcoming Ordinance in Kansas City, Kansas.

Eighteen percent or 28,000 persons in Kansas City, Kansas are foreign born. For me in the neighborhood I live in, this is very visible at the Park where I walk. On any given sunny warm day one can find vigorous games of volleyball, soccer and football. And the playground equipment is full of the vigor of young children delighting in swings and climbing bars. For me, the delight of all this is that those gathered are a rainbow of Bhutanese, Black, Hispanic and Caucasian . . . of all age groups. . . myself being on the older end!

Five years ago I joined a team of persons in Wyandotte County. The team includes government officials, teachers, community leaders and people of faith. There was a concern for how we can make all the persons who live in our community feel both Safe and Welcomed. The Ordinance of Safe and Welcoming that was passed by the Unified Government Commission was for the purpose of telling everyone that we welcome them as our neighbors and friends. This Ordinance took years of stop and start negotiations with law enforcement and Unified Government to bring us together to a place that can allow immigrants in the community to have a trusted relationship with law enforcement.

At the beginning of this Legislative Session, Alan Cobb, the CEO of the Kansas Chamber did a podcast with a local journalist. He stated that the major concern of businesses in Kansas is the workforce and I would note, he didn't say taxes.

All of us here know that the Immigration System in our country is broken and has been broken for a long time. We need workers. But there is no avenue for many of those workers to have a legal standing. The Ks unemployment rate is 2.6% - lowest rate in a decade.

As a person of Faith, I desire to be practical. That is why I mention the need for workers. Kansas is not alone in need of these workers. In Kansas City, Kansas we want these workers and their families to know that we welcome them and value them.

As a person of Faith my being in front of you today goes deeper than the practical. I belong to a Church that works for Justice for Immigrants and asks me and the members of our Church to do the same. The Immigrant and Refugee arm of the Catholic Church recently joined the Alliance for a New Immigration Consensus. This group of Faith Leaders, Law Enforcement and Business – including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce – is working to forge a way for Congress to begin to fix the broken immigration system.

And I raise for your remembrance Dr King who gave his life for his dream of a Beloved Community. I call the memory of our Brother Jesus who gave His Life praying that "we all be one". I ask you to remember your beliefs as you walk by that mural on the way into this Committee and as you work this issue.

I want to conclude, by anticipating the celebration of St. Patrick and Blessing YOU

May the Kansas roads rise up to meet you
May the prairie winds be always at your back
May the rain fall soft upon your fields and your hearts
And until we meet again
May God keep Kansas Safe and Welcoming
and may you be held in the Palm of God's Hand.

Thank YOU for hearing me this morning.