

Chairman Barker, Vice Chair Arnberger, Ranking Member Ruiz, and members of the House and State Affairs Committee: I am writing to you in deep opposition of HB 2717.

I am reaching out today as a Douglas County resident, community organizer, and daughter of immigrants who arrive in this country over thirty years. As a member of the immigrant community, I have witness and experienced the difficulties of navigating a new community, language barriers, xenophobia and an unclear and untrustworthy path toward citizenship. I have seen my family and so many others leave their home country, sometimes fleeing extreme violence and harm, to a place that is completely foreign. Much of my life and the lives of my community have been fraught with barrier after barrier to simply exist and enjoy much of the freedoms you yourself may take for granted. Through all of that, I have also witness and experienced the beauty of this country and this state. My family has welcomed by Kansans, given opportunity to build a life and a chance to make this country our home. I have seen the goodness this community can provide when we truly look out for each other, putting our neighbors in spaces of safety and care.

This is, above all, is why I urge you to stop HB 2717 from proceeding. This bill was written out of fear, a reaction to more communities taking a stand to show up fully for their neighbors and say, enough with fear mongering, enough hiding in the shadows, we are here to care and protect every single person living in Kansas.

HB 2717 would effectively null and void the Sanctuary Ordinance adopted by the City of Lawrence back in 2020. This ordinance was created out of a need to prevent the harmful and often unlawful practices of federal immigration forces. We have witness time and time again an escalation of civil violations far beyond what a citizen would experience. I encourage you all to remember, immigration violation is civil law not criminal. We have never asked our police force to stay out of the work to protect their citizens but rather ask them to draw a clear line in their involvement with civil violating activity that is out of their preview. We asked and our elected officials and local police listened and thus our ordinance was created and codified. Now, I ask you to do the same.

I ask you to truly think about why this bill has come across your committee. Not to ensure safety but to create unnecessary fear of those who do not have the same citizenship status as you. I ask you to remind yourselves of the power of leadership in our local municipalities and respecting local home rule authority. We elect our local leaders to listen and work with us to make our community stronger. The City of Lawrence and Lawrence Police Department did just that. Finally, I ask that you think of the cost of turning away community members who have lived among us, who have worked beside us and who continue to make the state of Kansas an economic force.

Say no to bill 2717. Stop the senseless xenophobic rhetoric created by those who live in imaginary fear. Support and respect local municipal government. Give families, like mine, the chance to succeed in this country.

In Solidarity,

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