

Oral Testimony of Alejandro Rangel-Lopez
University of Kansas, Student from Dodge City
Before the Committee on Federal and State Affairs
Kansas State House of Representatives

Hearing on HB2717: Concerning the Prohibition of Local Entities from Preventing the
Enforcement of Federal Immigration Laws

March 15th, 2022

Chairman Barker, Vice Chair Arnberger, and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

Thank y'all so much for the opportunity to testify before this committee today regarding the passage of HB2717 concerning the prohibition of local entities from preventing the enforcement of federal immigration laws. My name is Alejandro Rangel-Lopez, and I am a junior at KU from Dodge City studying public administration and political science while working two jobs as lead coordinator for the New Frontiers Project out in Southwest Kansas and as an RA. The New Frontiers Project is a group led by people of color, for people of color dedicated to holistic approaches to civic engagement through mutual aid such as a community pantry as well as social justice to educate, engage, and empower marginalized folks. I am here to speak with you today to urge you to vote against this harmful piece of legislation that seeks to push immigrants back into the shadows of society and take power away from local entities to make decisions that are best for their communities.

When most folks look at Kansas, they don't see the wealth of diversity that has made me proud to call myself a Kansan. I was born and raised in Dodge City, one of our state's most diverse and immigrant-dense communities as well as one of the few towns whose residents are minority-majority. Communities like Dodge City enrich our state's culture, economy, and civic scenes. It is thanks to immigrants that cities like mine that should be dying, are thriving and feeding the nation. Immigrants like my parents, Lucia and Martin who moved to Kansas in the mid-1990s straight from Mexico and who continue to contribute greatly to my hometown's growth. People like my best friend Victoria, who came to the U.S. at the age of 7 and is now at KU studying strategic communications. Folks such as a lot of y'all's ancestors, who experienced many of the same things that my parents went through just a couple decades ago.

You may say that this legislation does not target *legal* immigrants, only those that are undocumented. However, the harsh reality is that many of us, including me up until a few years ago, live in mixed-status families. That is, families where some are so-called legal immigrants and others who were not as fortunate are undocumented and living in the shadows of society, doing many of the jobs that employers are now struggling to fill. It is because of this reality that

folks are scared of approaching their local law enforcement out of fear that they or a loved one will be deported, even if a legitimate crime has been committed. That's what stopped my mom from reporting her abusive-ex-husband. That's what delayed her justice and cost her her right to see my two older siblings grow up as they were kidnapped by her ex-husband and taken to Mexico. This happened in the year 2001, she couldn't see them until she got her green card this year, twenty-one years later.

Our immigration system is broken, everyone agrees there. However, the answer isn't to weaponize a community's police force against its immigrant population. Prohibiting communities from making decisions that are in the best interest of *their* residents does nothing but instill fear in our state's most hardworking people. Just like anyone else, immigrants and their families want to be able to approach a police officer without having to worry about whether someone they love is at risk of being detained. An officer's duty is to protect their local community, not serve as an agent of big government. Additionally, HB2717 undermines local autonomy and the ability of towns and cities to make decisions for themselves and their residents.

It should be clear to you now that this is not a game, the choices you make as a legislator have very real impacts on the lives of people like me and my family. Listen to us when we tell you this will have insidious effects on crime reporting in immigrant communities. Listen to us when we tell you that your decisions don't exist in a vacuum.

In closing, I want to urge you to vote against HB2717. Thank you all for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration in your decision.