

Marcus Winn, Metro Organization for Racial and Economic Equity
HB 2717 - Opposed
Written only

My name is Marcus Winn, I live in Wyandotte County and work for a community organization called Metro Organization for Racial and Economic Equity, or MORE², a coalition of congregations of faith working together to better our communities. MORE² is just one of over two dozen local organizations that form the Safe and Welcoming Coalition, which pushed for passage of the Safe and Welcoming Act on February 10, 2022. We are strongly opposed to HB 2717.

The Safe and Welcoming City Act was vetted extensively by the Unified Government attorneys, negotiated with local law enforcement at the table, and supported by a majority of our democratically elected county commission.

HB 2717 misunderstands the Safe and Welcoming Act and, in doing so, has the potential to undermine the public safety of all Kansans. The purpose of the Safe and Welcoming Act is to build trust among our community with local law enforcement. We know, because many other municipalities have passed similar local laws across the nation and they have the data, that such common sense measures not only increase trust with local law enforcement, but crime is also measurably lower because residents are more likely to report it. Poverty and reliance on public assistance is measurably lower, because families are not separated.

Passing HB 2717 sends several unintended messages. First, it tells community organizations that dialogue and negotiation are wasteful endeavors. Rather than work with public officials from differing perspectives, if HB 2717 becomes law the lesson is clear: they won't respect us so we should simply seek to oppose all who think differently. I remain hopeful that Kansas can be a place where we come together, despite differences of perspective, and work for the common good.

Second, passing HB 2717 would put Kansas at a competitive disadvantage economically. Skepticisms were raised during the House committee hearings on this bill about whether its passage would actually impact the labor market, which is a legitimate question worth raising. What was not addressed was how aggressively targeting undocumented residents, innocent of any violent crime, as HB 2717 seeks to do, will unavoidably impact documented immigrants. The census estimates that over 100,000 Kansas residents have at least one unauthorized family member living in the same household. Passing HB 2717 will drive thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of fully legal workers out of state.

Passing HB 2717 would decrease communication between local communities and law enforcement, increasing crime. Data suggests that taking immigration concerns out of the policing of local crimes lead to 35.5 fewer crimes committed per 10,000 people. Additionally, local economies benefit, with annual income an average of \$4,353 higher, the poverty rate 2.3% lower, and unemployment 1.1% lower than local communities that take the opposite approach.

Finally, it has been stated that Kansas needs a uniform state policy. Yet, this false concern ignores the reality of local law enforcement across our state. We do not have uniform hiring policies, use of force policies, transparency policies, and so many more. We rightfully recognize that diverse local conditions often require differing local policy. Hence why we have over 700 local law enforcement agencies, rather than a single unified Kansas law enforcement. Why, then, is this situation different? It is not. Imposing a single, mandated policy will inevitably expand the scope of state government to interfere and impose other policies traditionally left to local jurisdictions. Once crossed that precedent may return in unexpected ways.

Local communities know the local issues, and should retain the liberty to decide for themselves how to address those issues locally. HB 2717 deeply undermines the principle of home rule, relying instead on unfunded, big-brother mandates on matters traditionally left to local municipalities. Whether you agree with the local decision, we hope that this body will stand up for the freedom of local communities and not encroach upon our local decision making. **Do not pass this bill!**