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OFFICE OF JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



Date: February 24, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs

From: Ashley Hernandez, Organizing and Policy Coordinator for the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth - Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation

RE: Opposition of SB 254

Chairman Mike Thompson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth (SCL) is writing to express **opposition to Senate Bill 254**, which seeks to prohibit individuals unlawfully present in the United States from receiving any state or local public benefits. This bill not only **undermines the economic and social fabric of our state but also contradicts the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching**.

Immigrants, including those without legal status, are integral to Kansas's economy and communities. Their contributions are evident in various sectors. In Kansas, immigrants make up **8.7% of the labor force**, filling crucial roles in industries like agriculture, manufacturing, and construction. In 2018, immigrant-led households in Kansas contributed significantly to the state's economy, paying **\$966.9 million in federal taxes** and **\$588 million in state and local taxes**. Furthermore, undocumented immigrants in Kansas contributed an estimated **\$72.4 million in federal taxes** and **\$66.2 million in state and local taxes**. Their economic impact extends beyond tax contributions, as **13,938 immigrant business owners** accounted for **9% of all self-employed Kansas residents**, generating **\$322.9 million in business income** circulating throughout the state's economy.

Despite these positive contributions, many argue that undocumented immigrants are an economic burden, take jobs from native-born workers, or contribute to crime. These claims do not hold up against the evidence. First, contrary to the belief that undocumented immigrants drain public resources, they contribute significantly through taxes while often being ineligible for many public benefits. In **2022, undocumented immigrants nationwide paid \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes**. Second, immigrants do not take jobs away from native-born Kansans but rather **fill labor shortages in industries that lack willing workers**, such as agriculture and meatpacking. Their presence strengthens vital sectors of our economy, ensuring the sustainability of industries that depend on a reliable workforce. Finally, the notion that undocumented immigrants increase crime rates is refuted by multiple studies. Between 1990 and 2013, as the number of **undocumented immigrants more than tripled, the rate of violent crime in the**

U.S. fell by 48%, demonstrating that immigration does not correlate with increased criminal activity.

Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the inherent dignity of every human person and the moral imperative to support the vulnerable and marginalized. Key principles include the **dignity of the human person**, which affirms that every individual is created in the image of God and **deserves respect and compassion, regardless of their legal status**. The principle of solidarity calls us to stand with and support our brothers and sisters, recognizing our shared humanity. Lastly, the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable insists that **society must prioritize the needs of the poor and marginalized, ensuring they have access to essential services and opportunities**. By denying public benefits to undocumented individuals, SB 254 disregards these teachings, effectively marginalizing a significant portion of our community and denying them the basic support necessary for human dignity.

Senate Bill 254 opposes the moral teachings that guide us to uphold the dignity of every person and to act with compassion and justice. It also disregards the substantial economic and social contributions that immigrants make to our state. Instead of passing laws that exclude and punish members of our community, **we should seek policies that integrate and support all individuals who contribute to Kansas's prosperity**. I urge you to consider the broader implications of this bill and to uphold the values that strengthen our communities by opposing SB 254.

Thank you for the opportunity to present you with this testimony. Should you have any questions please contact me at ahernandez@scls.org.

Sincerely,

Ashley Hernandez, MPA

Organizing and Policy Coordinator

Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation – Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

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Resources

American Immigration Council. "Immigrants in Kansas." (americanimmigrationcouncil.org)

Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. "Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants." (itep.org)

New American Economy. "New Report Shows Immigrants in Southwest Kansas Paid Over \$192 Million in Taxes and Held More Than \$595 Million in Spending Power in 2019." (newamericaneconomy.org)

League of United Latin American Citizens. "The Economic Benefits of Fixing Our Broken Immigration System: Impacts for Kansas." (lulac.org)