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Date: February 12, 2012

To: House Federal and State Affairs Committee  
Representative Steve Brunk, Chairman

From: Angela Ferguson, Austin & Ferguson, L.L.C.

RE: HB 2712 and HB 2603 -Supporting the Kansas Business Workers and Community Partnership Act

Chairman Brunk and Members of the Committee:

I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 2712, because of my interest and commitment to improving the lives of immigrants in our communities. I am a native of Kansas, born and raised in Haven Kansas, and a graduate of Wichita State University and the University of Kansas School of Law. For the past 25 years, I have practiced immigration law in Kansas and Missouri, and I am community activist, working on immigration issues. I am on the Board of the Jewish Vocational Services, an agency that resettles refugees; on the Board of the Missouri Immigrant & Refugee Advocates, and a founding member of the Advocates for Immigrant Rights & Reconciliation, a faith-based coalition in Wyandotte and Johnson counties.

In my practice, I have a large number of open cases, all of which are immigration cases and on a daily basis, I meet with 5-10 immigrants and families to discuss their legal needs. Handling family, business, asylum and removal cases, I believe that I have a broad and detailed understanding of the lives of immigrants living in Kansas. For this reason, I am offering specific information on the question of whether or not immigrants would come forward and apply for this temporary benefit, if HB 2712 passes.

Immigrants living in Kansas have arrived here by many different paths, some legally, some illegally, but the common thread is that they are seeking a better life, the American Dream. Most of them are on a path, in the process to become legal, whether through a family member, an employer, or another method provided in the law. Oftentimes, that process is very long and there are obstacles along the way. While the immigrant is waiting in the line, or going through the legal steps, one main goal is to not get caught. These immigrant families live in fear of apprehension, they try to obey every possible law, yet they still have to survive and care for their families. This involves working, driving, and a myriad of activities that make up our daily lives. Simple tasks such as opening a bank account, cashing a check, obtaining a loan, or purchasing and tagging a vehicle are extraordinarily difficult when you are trying to live invisibly to avoid detection.

House Fed & State Affairs

Date: 2-14-12

Attachment

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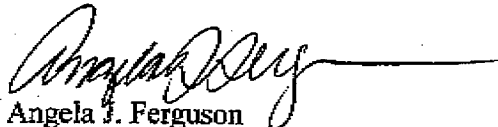
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HB 2712 would allow undocumented immigrants to step out of the shadows and become a part of our communities. The benefits that would bring include the possibility of a legal drivers license, a restricted social security number, the ability to conduct daily business, enter into contracts, file taxes and live without fear. For many of our Kansas residents, living in fear of apprehension affects the way they raise their children, the way they integrate into local communities, their health, and many other aspects of their lives. By providing a chance for this temporary work authorization, immigrant families will be better able to financially support their U.S. Citizen children, reducing the need to rely upon the State's safety net of public benefits. With employment authorization, the immigrant worker would be able to qualify for employer insurance benefits, thus reducing burdens on our emergency medical facilities in Kansas.

The proposed partnership that is contained in HB 2712, brings the Federal government and State government together, working with community leaders to resolve many of the concerns that we all have with our broken immigration system. Because the Federal process takes so long, the immigrants are currently left without any type of status while they wait. The State can help change this by providing employers with this local process and working with the Federal government, giving the immigrant a temporary program to work legally, drive legally, and conduct business in Kansas legally. As a result, we will have communities that are stronger, partnerships with faith-based organizations to provide services, immigrants are visible and integrated, and our businesses benefit from having legal workers who have a commitment to the program and the State. This is a win-win proposal for all Kansans, and I urge you to support HB2712.

  
Angela J. Ferguson  
Attorney at Law