



Testimony

Unified Government Public Relations
701 N. 7th Street, Room 620
Kansas City, Kansas 66101

Mike Taylor, Public Relations Director
913.573.5565 mtaylor@wycokck.org

House Bill 2576 Immigration Enforcement/Public Benefits

Delivered February 15, 2012
House Federal and State Affairs Committee

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City opposes House Bill 2576 because it is an unworkable, massive unfunded mandate. The Unified Government doesn't have the staff to carry out the burdensome bureaucracy created by the bill nor do we have the budget to pay for it. The Unified Government is a member of the Kansas Business Coalition for Immigration Reform.

There is a new trend playing into the financial difficulties facing local governments. Now that the Kansas Legislature has stopped paying most of the money it owes cities and counties, it is compounding the issue by passing new laws and dumping the cost of paying for them on local governments. Regardless of your view or opinion on immigration enforcement, HB 2576 is unworkable because it requires cities and counties to take on duties we don't have the staff to administer nor the budget to afford. And it will hurt our citizens and the Kansas economy.

This bill requires anyone over the age of 18 to provide specific documentation proving legal residency before receiving public benefits. The bill requires not just a drivers license, but the documents required to get a drivers license. Many people can't readily find their birth certificate or other identifying documentation.

Let me give you a few examples of how difficult, harmful and unworkable this is for local government.

- The Wyandotte County Health Department is frontline medical care for many of our residents when it comes to prevention and nutrition. 30,000 individuals make 80,000 visits a year for health services. Having to verify citizenship will be an administrative nightmare. The Health Department does not have the staff to do this. Imagine turning away a pregnant mother who comes to our pre-natal clinic for baby vitamins and other pregnancy related health services because her citizenship can't be readily confirmed. How many pregnant mothers will be denied needed health care because of this bill? How many unborn babies will be harmed?
- The Unified Government owns the Board of Public Utilities, a municipal utility which provides electric and water service to most of our 154,000 citizens. This bill says anyone over 18 entering into a contract with local government must provide documentation of citizenship. How will BPU confirm every application for electric and water service? It's a rhetorical question. It can't.
- Kansas City Kansas requires every business operating in the city to obtain a business license. In 2011, the City had more than 7,500 licensed businesses operating. Big businesses such as General Motors, to small service and retail businesses. There is no way our business licensing staff can process and confirm that volume of documents. This bill hurts businesses big and small, our local economy and the Kansas economy.

House Fed & State Affairs

Date: 2-16-12

2

- This bill will also complicate and harm economic development efforts. For example, the Unified Government just did huge development deals which resulted in the construction of LiveStrong Sporting Park, home of the Sporting KC major league soccer team; the Cerner Corporation office complex which will create 4,500 new high paying healthcare technology jobs; and the Hollywood Casino at Kansas Speedway which created 1,700 construction jobs and 1,000 permanent casino jobs. Can all of those companies prove they are eligible to receive the public benefits of tax incentives under this bill? Do all of those companies use E-Verify? Would they change their corporate policies and practices and go through the bureaucracy created by this bill to build and expand in Kansas? Or would they just move across the state line to Missouri?

A community like Kansas City will be impacted harder than many others by this bill and others being debated this week. U.S. Census numbers show 28% of our population is Hispanic. That fact increases the workload and the burden of all these unfunded mandates. Raising property taxes to pay for the unfunded mandates in HB 2576 is not a sound option in Wyandotte County. More likely, the negative budget impacts of HB 2576 will have to be paid for by further cuts in services and elimination of more programs. It's a heavy price to impose on the majority of our citizens to try and identify a small percentage of undocumented residents.