



SISTERS OF CHARITY OF LEAVENWORTH

SOCIAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Senate Federal & State Affairs Committee

In support of SB 399

February 15, 2012

Sister Therese Bangert

Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

Chairman Brungardt and members of the Committee,

Our Community, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, at our Chapter that is held every 6 years (it has some similarities to a legislative session) prioritized our concerns for our sisters and brothers who are immigrants. In our sponsored works and our individual ministries we witness day to day the impact that the broken system has and the suffering that it causes.

We agreed back in the summer of 2010 to raise this issue in our prayers and to study the complexities. We used many of the Catholic Churches' documents and statements. Our Sisters who had direct contact with those who are immigrants shared stories. We heard directly from immigrants. This six-month process led to our taking what we call a Community Stance. The stance is attached to this testimony.

First and foremost, I think that everyone in this room acknowledges that immigration is a federal issue. We would not be discussing HB 2712/2603 today if the federal government had not allowed this broken system to continue.

This bill that has been months in conversation and preparation acknowledges that the citizens of Kansas and our sisters and brothers who are immigrants are interdependent. We need each other.

My chaplain heart affirms the parts of the legislation that

- Acknowledges the worker's family
- Requires the employer to pay the fee
- Assures equal wages and benefits
- Provides a Kansas ID
- Acknowledges need for resources for agencies involved in application process

At the same time, I am very aware that this legislation does not give any protected status or path toward citizenship to the worker that the Dept. of Labor has certified that we need. This is a concern. These words from an immigrant affirmed support of this bill:

When an immigrant leaves their country, they leave their loved ones and everything they have and are familiar with. They make this decision because most of the time there is no more option left for them in their own country. I'm an immigrant. I came to this country undocumented 25 years ago. When we make the decision to come we don't choose to come without documents just to break the law. We choose to do it because for many of us low-income persons there is no legal avenue available. Most of us have been without a job, sometimes without food, or even worse our very lives have been threatened.

As we establish ourselves here and develop new roots, we are at risk of being marginalized and abused. Sometimes we work long hours just to be taken advantage of. But we continue to work and make the most of it, because we are used to working hard and we have no choice. Every morning when we get up we are at risk as soon as we step out the door and sit behind the wheel. We are at risk of being stopped and detained. It is not our desire to live under the shadows and in fear all the time, yet we do it because we have no choice. We live at risk every minute of our lives and still manage to have hope that one day God will touch the harden hearts and we will be given a break to breath freely. That is our hope. That is our cry.

So I can tell you without a doubt in my mind that applying for this program will be less risky than living under the shadows and at risk of being detained and finger printed under the secure community program. It will be less risky than driving to work without a driver's license. It will be less risky than working under the table or with fake papers.

As I stand up here, I am so aware that I did not one thing that caused me to be born in this country. I did not one thing that allows me to be a citizen of this country. I know that I take this citizenship seriously and am active in working to make this country a better place. I believe these workers also are contributing to making this country a better place. It is my hope that the law proposed in this bill for the good of all Kansas will prompt the Department of Homeland Security's full utilization of the discretionary relief available to immigrants. At the same time, may Congress be spurred to enact Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

Thank You for listening. Peace be with YOU!



SISTERS OF CHARITY
OF LEAVENWORTH

Community Stance in Support of Comprehensive Immigration Reform

*“Impelled by the love of Christ,
we, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth,
offer every loving service in our power
to meet the critical needs of God’s people.”
(SCL Mission Statement, 2010)*

For 152 years the love of Christ has impelled members of the Sisters of Charity to provide leadership in the education, pastoral and healthcare needs of many who were immigrants. Based on long-standing Catholic social teaching, we now also raise our voices, urging our elected officials to effect Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

While acknowledging the right of the United States to control its borders and that the issue of immigration is complex, we also recognize the suffering caused to separated families, exploited workers and those forced to flee from their homelands by poverty, hunger and other forms of violence. In light of our mission statement, we, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, call for Comprehensive Immigration Reform in our country.

In doing so, we join the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in calling for the inclusion of the following elements in Comprehensive Immigration Reform:

- o Global anti-poverty policies to help provide for the basic needs of the poor in underdeveloped nations.
- o Expanded opportunities to reunify families.
- o Temporary worker programs to permit a just and humane system for workers to enter our country legally.
- o Broad-based legalization opportunities for the approximately 11 million undocumented migrants presently in the U.S.
- o Restoration of due process with regard to legal rights of immigrants.

With the dignity of the human person as the foundation of this statement, we ask those among whom we live and work to join us in this struggle to reform the immigration policy of our country.

May 2011

