

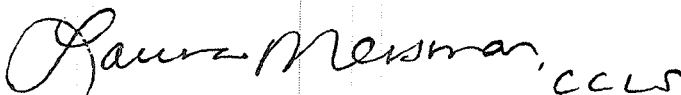
Dear Chairman Barker and members of the Committee on Federal and State Affairs,

My name is Laura Mersman and I have worked in the field of social services within the Kansas City Kansas Public School system of Wyandotte County for the past nine years. I oppose bill HB2717 for the negative impact this bill will have on children and families within Wyandotte County. I work with high school students and families experiencing homelessness across all cultural lines- citizens, refugees, and immigrants alike. This House Bill not only adds more red tape to these families' struggles, but also adds fear, unclear boundaries, and prevents families from accessing resources that they are eligible for and need. Identification alone is such a large barrier for young adults and families experiencing homelessness who do not have a steady address, have lost documents along the way, and may lack the knowledge and financial resource to reacquire and apply for these documents. The Safe and Welcoming Act's municipal ID would provide these youth and their families a simpler, fraud-proof way of accessing critical resources such as local grants to support rental and utility assistance as well as the ability to gain rights as simple as picking their student up from school or getting a library card.

For those students and families experiencing homelessness who are also wary of the local police, HB 2717 only increases the likelihood that if they are victims of crime, these crimes will go unreported. If there is no clear boundary set for when the local police will contact ICE or other federal agencies, families will not be willing to take that risk. Families and children experiencing homelessness often rely on external family members, friends, and sometimes strangers for housing. For our community, their rights in these vulnerable situations are most important to preserve. If these families do not feel that they have protection when contacting the authorities, any criminal acts or trauma within their situation will continue. I have seen the impact that this lack of reporting has on children and families, and they deserve better. They deserve to feel safe.

Wyandotte County has one of the most diverse populations in the country and the commissioners and mayor of Wyandotte County should be trusted that their decision to pass the Safe and Welcoming Act is in the best interest of their residents. The children of Wyandotte County deserve Safe and Welcoming Wyandotte to remain and move Kansas City and its families forward. Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Mersman, CCLS". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Laura Mersman, CCLS