

Testimony of Dr. Jaime Perales

I recently got a very personal reminder of why we need ordinances to protect our communities and local resources from federal overreach.

My wife and I went to a public lake in Shawnee Mission, KS. As I neared the shore on my paddle board, a police officer was asking my wife questions. He'd stopped her because she wasn't wearing a life jacket. My wife had both life jackets in her kayak, but I wasn't wearing nor carrying one with me. He decided to give only me a ticket, and I understood why. My life jacket was not within my reach.

He asked her for our names (mine is Spanish) and address. Then he asked for my city and country of birth. I was surprised but answered accordingly. He then asked me for my Social Security Number, which I also gave, even though it sounded excessive and other people could have heard this private information. Again, my wife had told him our address and that I had my driver's license with me.

It is likely that some of you have been issued a ticket for a minor offense. But were you asked for your country of birth and Social Security Number in the process? I don't know anything about the police officer who fined me. He's probably a decent person. The fact is that the Park Police now have information about my immigration status.

I happen to be a US citizen, but what if I weren't? How do I know they won't share this information with ICE? I'd be at risk of being arrested, questioned, and deported for not wearing a life jacket. I love how diverse the families who come to the park are. It truly feels like a community. But with discriminatory legislations such as HB 2717, I fear for our community. I went for a paddle and came home with a \$200 ticket. What if someone else had gone for a swim and never got to come home again simply for being undocumented? Also, why should a park police officer whose only job is to serve and protect their community be forced to do the bidding of a well-funded federal agency?

We cannot leave the decision to collaborate or not with ICE to inherently biased humans, be it police or local government employees. I firmly oppose HB 2717 because it would make our state a more unsafe place for our friends and neighbors. In fact, I think the legislature's time would be better spent by passing laws that protect local resources and hard-working community members.

Thank you.

Dr. Jaime Perales