

Testimony in Opposition to HB 2717

Chair Barker and members of the House Federal and State Affairs Committee, I write today in opposition to HB 2717. I am Dr. Shannon Portillo and, for eighteen months, from June 2020 through December of 2021, I co-chaired Governor Laura Kelly's Commission on Racial Equity and Justice. The Commission, which brought together 15 Kansans with backgrounds in law enforcement, education, advocacy, health care, and local government, was tasked with identifying ways to address racial disparities across Kansas. We hosted 27 learning sessions and 37 Commission meetings, culminating in over 150 recommendations for state agencies, the legislature, and local governments to address barriers within local governments, state agencies, and state statutes. For the first twelve months, we focused on reforms in the criminal justice system. Having spent the entirety of my career studying local government and issues of criminal and administrative justice, this work was incredibly important to me.

In our first report, we directly addressed immigration and law enforcement (pg. 26: https://governor.kansas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CREJ-Report-December-1-2020_FINAL-1.pdf). You will see that we not only urge that local law enforcement not duplicate the work of federal immigration agencies, but we also advocate for driver's licenses for non-citizen residents. This aligns with current research on criminal justice in two important ways. First, when immigrant communities know that local law enforcement is focused on community safety, and not immigration enforcement, they are more likely to trust law enforcement and cooperate with them. This leads to safer communities for everyone. Second, allowing IDs and driver's licenses for non-citizens leads to more insured drivers and less administrative burden for law enforcement officers who interact with immigrant communities. HB 2717 would move us away from these recommendations. HB 2717 would make it harder for local law enforcement to do their jobs, by shifting their role from community safety to enforcement of civil violations of federal immigration law.

Additionally, I serve as a County Commissioner for Douglas County's Third District. In this capacity I have been able to put into practice much of what I have studied over the past two decades. I get to see how important it is that people have the governments closest to them making decisions regarding the criminal justice system. I was elected to represent a community that favors sanctuary policies and strives to create an environment where we respect our neighbors regardless of documentation status.

HB 2717 takes away local communities' ability to govern themselves. This type of preemption from the state undermines trust in government by moving it further from the people and erodes the role of local government in local communities. Our citizens have spoken, and this is not how they want to use local resources. I urge the committee to retain local control, respect home rule by not advancing this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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