

Testimony on HB 2717 – OPPOSED

WRITTEN ONLY

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For the past 40 years I have pastored in the Central Avenue neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas. In the 1980s and early 1990s our neighborhood, community, and businesses were drying up and blowing away. Central Avenue was becoming a ghost town. But in the mid-1990s people began to arrive who wanted to be in our community. In a short span of 10 years our neighborhood and community became vibrant and full again. The vacant storefronts on Central Avenue began to fill up and families found homes.

But those families who built our community continue to live in the shadows, afraid to report crimes, afraid to participate in community groups, oftentimes afraid to go out. And with good reason. Reporting a crime or simply a broken taillight could result in a broken family. The same families who created a vibrant community live in fear. These families easily make up ¼ of the population of Wyandotte County. The Safe and Welcoming Act passed by the Unified Government commission is a well thought out, local policy that addresses these challenges to building a beloved community.

However, Attorney General Derek Schmidt, in an unabashedly political move, believes he knows what's best for our community. He is seeking to subvert our community driven, 5-year effort to bring more welcome and, especially, more safety to our community. His claim is that he wants to avoid a patch-work of legislation across the state. In doing so, he violates the principle of home rule, a principle that resonates across political perspectives. Home rule, "allows local officials the flexibility to adapt to a constantly changing world. . . Uniform state laws don't always serve the diverse needs of our communities, and Home Rule allows many of those decisions to be made by local officials elected by the people."

https://www.lkm.org/page/Home_Rule

The bill intends to prevent local communities from making life better for themselves. If AG Schmidt were serious about avoiding patchwork legislation, then, in the words of Angela Ferguson, the bill should be flipped. Instead of a bill to prevent good policy across Kansas, the bill should encourage more communities to enact safe and welcoming legislation as such legislation has been proven to make communities safer and more economically vibrant.

We must continue our work to fix a broken immigration system. But since congress has been incapable of doing that for 30 years, Kansas City, Kansas has chosen to be inclusive of those

whom God has placed in our midst. To be a safe community we must welcome those who make our neighborhoods vibrant and who are our neighbors, our fellow church members, our sons and daughters-in-law, our baristas and our entrepreneurs. HB 2717 calls for the exact opposite. It will not only hurt our neighbors. It will hurt all of us. Making us less safe, making us less hospitable, and, worst of all, making us less human.

God is calling us to build beloved communities by loving God and loving our neighbors. I call on the Kansas Senate and Governor Kelly to say no to HB 2717.