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Private Citizen

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SB 254

Written Only

Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony regarding the negative effects of SB 254. I am urging the committee to protect educational opportunities for all Kansans and to vote no on SB 254. Education plays a vital role in improving our communities, particularly in rural areas.

Several years ago, the state faced a bill very similar to the one we are dealing with today. At that time, I provided testimony as a DACA student navigating college to emphasize that we do not qualify for any federal or state public aid. Through DACA, we only receive a work permit that allows us to work.

With my DACA status, I was able to return to my hometown in southwest Kansas and work at the meatpacking plant in my community to raise funds for my college education.

During that time, I hoped that in-state tuition would remain available. I feared that changes in policy could jeopardize my ability to finish college. Financially, I was already struggling to afford in-state tuition, and out-of-state rates would have made it impossible for me to continue my education. I remember speaking with a representative and assuring them that we meant no harm and were not taking anything away; rather, we were seeking the opportunity to advance and contribute positively through our education. Fortunately, my fears were alleviated when the bill did not pass.

Today, I can proudly affirm that my words to that representative were true, and I have kept my promise. I graduated debt-free by paying for my tuition entirely out of pocket. Working at the meatpacking plant was challenging, but I am always grateful because my work did not take resources from anyone; instead, I contributed to the state economy.

Many undocumented individuals often avoid seeking assistance through local services due to fear of retaliation or the need to maintain a clean record for potential legal status in the future. It is also a fact that undocumented immigrants contribute billions in federal and state taxes, even though they do not qualify for Social Security. This demonstrates that immigrants bring valuable contributions to our communities, states, and nation.

Currently, I work in my hometown, helping communities address health barriers to create healthier environments. I also work part-time at an adult learning center because I love sharing knowledge and assisting others. Through my efforts, I was able to afford my master's degree without taking anything from the state or country. My hope is that this letter helps others realize that we are not burdens but individuals eager to advance and improve our communities.

The country is divided over the issue of whether to criminalize undocumented individuals. Having been in that position, I can firmly state that we are not all criminals. Many of us cry out for an opportunity. Mass deportation and targeting undocumented immigrants can waste valuable resources and funding. While no one opposes the arrest of actual criminals, we cannot categorize all individuals based on the actions of a few. Bad apples exist in every group, regardless of race or color.

Instead of mass deportation, it is time for comprehensive immigration reform. Such reform would inject additional funds into the economy and help alleviate job shortages, especially in agriculture. DACA recipients undergo fingerprinting every two years. Comprehensive immigration reform could include qualifications to ensure that only those who have worked, maintained clean records, and contributed positively to this country would be considered for legal status.

Many of us implore you to think through your decision and vote against these bills. These proposed measures would instill fear and increase hatred against our community, ultimately driving away many immigrants who are contributing to our state and local communities. This could have serious consequences for our economy, particularly in rural areas.

We encourage you to employ both logic and empathy in your decision-making process. A comprehensive reform would be a far better option for our states and nation.

Thank you for your time, and may God help us all!

