

Testimony Opposing HB 2717
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I am Pastor Rick Behrens from Kansas City, Kansas and I oppose this bill because loving God means loving our neighbors and thereby creating safe and welcoming communities.

For the past 40 years I have pastored in the Central Avenue neighborhood of Kansas City, Kansas. I watched in the 1980s and early 1990s as 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. To do what this bill requires would devastate our community economically and socially.

The unfunded mandate of this bill is that every local law enforcement officer become an enforcer of federal immigration law. This is not their job and all it does is makes our communities less safe, makes it harder to build a trusting community and breaks up mixed status families putting unjust strain on the fabric of the beloved communities we are all trying to build and inhabit.

We can't fix a broken immigration system. But we can take care of those whom God has placed in our midst. We can care for those who have made our neighborhoods vibrant and who have become our neighbors, our fellow church members, our sons and daughters-in-law, our baristas and our entrepreneurs. This bill 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 economically, making us less as Kansans, and, worst of all, making us less human.

God is calling us to build beloved communities by loving God and loving our neighbors. This bill does none of that.