

To the members of the Local Government Committee,

My name is Josh Dunn, and I am submitting this testimony today in opposition of House Bills 4105 and 4334 as both the Executive Director of Voces, a nonprofit serving the Hispanic/Latino and immigrant communities based in Battle Creek, and as a concerned private citizen of our state. These proposed pieces of legislation, with the supposed intent of making our communities safer by creating mini-local immigration enforcement agencies will in fact accomplish the opposite and will both destroy the fragile trust between police and minority populations, and discourage the growth of families and businesses in our state.

**These bills will create barriers for improving the economy of our state.**

Those of us who work with the immigrant community could tell hours of stories about their interactions with local law enforcement, and how trust is essential to creating impactful families. In my own case, we employ a woman at Voces whose child was the victim of gun violence - shot on their own front lawn. She and her family were undocumented at the time, yet because they were willing to cooperate with local law enforcement to find and prosecute the criminal, they had the opportunity to immigrate legally through a benefit that is called a "U Visa." Today, both of her sons are grown and employed, and one is working locally in the IT industry. She herself is a successful food entrepreneur, and her husband is employed by Michigan State University to educate the community across the southwest of this state on best practices for farming and agriculture in the 21st century. House Bills 4105 and 4334 would create an almost insurmountable barrier for this type of success story to be repeated.

**These bills will unduly burden law enforcement and destroy trust between them and immigrant communities.**

Perhaps more immediately relevant to this committee today is the question of whether these pieces of legislation will add to the safety of our communities. Nothing could be further from the truth - the threatened sanctions placed on local law enforcement through these bills will only increase the burden of protecting the public with already limited resources.

Voces recently hosted the chief of Battle Creek Police, the chief of Emmett Charter Township Police, and the Sheriff of Calhoun County to speak with the Latino community directly with the goal of developing a stronger bond of trust between the groups and to allow our community to ask questions directly about their policies and practices. While many items were discussed, **all three** of these leaders expressed concerns about the mixing of federal immigration law with local law enforcement and the paramount nature of building trust across diverse communities. I can think of no better way to show the committee exactly how laws such as these would be received by local law enforcement throughout the state than by sharing a selected portion of the transcript of exactly what they said to our community. These are their words, permitted for public consumption, though please note they were recorded as part of a community meeting and not in specific response to any proposed legislation:

**Our local law enforcement priorities public safety, which is not compatible with enforcing civil immigration law.**

From Chief Jim Blocker:

*As a Chief, one number concerns me more than any other....it's about all the crimes that people don't report. If you aren't willing to report a crime because of either fear of deportation or some sort of immigration rule or law, then that only enhances the victimization of the community and is counterproductive to very number I want to achieve...*

*None of the chiefs here are going to do that [take you to ICE without due process]. It's not our policy - it would have a chilling effect to develop relationships that we want to establish with you. Immigration laws are complicated to say the least - many of them are civil, not criminal... Because of the complexity, few chiefs are interested in participating in that program [287g]. In other words, we don't care about your immigration status, we care about your protection.*

From Sheriff Matt Saxton:

*It is not our officers and deputies duties to help with immigration enforcement... My deputies are not going out to assist with ICE we are here to enforce the laws of the State of Michigan and local ordinance and keep everyone in the community safe. And we need you to report crimes if you witness or are a victim of those crimes to keep everyone safe.*

From Chief Mike Olson:

*The one thing we are busy enough doing is enforcing the laws of the State of Michigan and local ordinances. We don't have time and have no intention to go out and work with the feds on any immigration issues... And the big thing is the dark crimes, and this is the thing where we learn to talk to and trust each other - I look to those numbers to decrease.*

**Stop these bills today and allow our communities to thrive, not divide.**

You can see that the experts on the ground feel strongly that serving as immigration officers goes against their mission to be a protector for ALL. And the proof of the counterproductive nature of this type of legislation is already out there. Studies have shown again and again that immigrant communities not only have lower rates of crime on average, but that they lower the rate of crime in communities overall AND directly contribute to their economic success. Studies also show that forcing local police officers to become immigration experts overnight and do the work of the federal government for them (through programs like 287g) dramatically increases racial profiling and costs to local jurisdictions for wrongful prosecution. Why should we believe House Bills 4105 and 4334 will result any differently?

I thank the committee for their time and attention, and I want again state my total opposition to these proposals and my sincerest hope that their consideration will be swiftly dismissed.

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