

February 6, 2018

Dear Pennsylvania Senators,

As faith leaders from many different traditions, we write out of grave concern regarding [HB 28](#), a piece of legislation that just yesterday passed the Pennsylvania House. As people of faith, we look first to the common values rooted in our sacred texts that remind us to love our neighbor and welcome the sojourner among us. As Leviticus 19:34 (CE) reminds us:

“Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.”

We urge you to recall that we are a country of immigrants and recognize the valuable contributions immigrants bring to our communities and congregations. Pennsylvania policies should reflect those values and treat immigrants with the respect and dignity we all deserve. HB 28 and its harsh rhetoric sends a divisive message and casts immigrants as threats rather than contributors to our communities.

We also believe HB 28 will erode trust between the immigrant community and local police and put our public safety at risk. Victims of crime and witnesses are far more likely to come forward when they are not threatened by the risk of being detained, deported and separated from their families.

It is likely that HB 28 will lead to liability issues for local law enforcement as well, as it did in *Miranda-Olivares vs. Clackamas County* in Oregon where a federal court found Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainer holds unconstitutional and thus mandated a settlement. Likewise, in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania, Mr. Ernesto Galarza, a U.S. Citizen born in Puerto Rico, was wrongfully detained on ICE's assertion that he was undocumented. Mr. Galarza won his case when the third district court ruled that local police are not required to honor an ICE detainer request and that Lehigh County shared in responsibility for violating Mr. Galarza's Fourth Amendment and due process rights.

HB 28 would unfairly punish local police departments for not targeting immigrants simply for being undocumented. This bill serves only to spread fear, hate, and xenophobia, and would not make communities in Pennsylvania any safer. By reporting and detaining individuals solely because they are believed to be undocumented immigrants, HB 28 would reverse years of intentional, community-based policing efforts that are vital to public safety in neighborhoods across the state.

We believe that HB 28 will create a more hostile environment for all immigrants and persons of color, which would lead to further discrimination and increased racial profiling, regardless of immigration or citizenship status. As we continue to raise consciousness about how our criminal justice system needs reform to stop targeting low-income communities of color, it bears noting

that the Latino population is often unjustly profiled. TRUST policies or “sanctuary” resolutions in which local police do not collaborate with ICE, do not prohibit immigrants from being prosecuted if they have committed a crime, as some have alleged. All individuals who commit crimes are charged and prosecuted just as in all jurisdictions.

As faith leaders, we stand with the more than three hundred local jurisdictions that have chosen to limit their collaboration with ICE. We are confident that these common sense and widely used community policing practices result in greater public safety for all because of the trust they build between immigrant communities and law enforcement. It is because of the positive work of these communities and the concerns we expressed above that we ask that you oppose HB 28.

In solidarity,

Conference Minister David Ackerman, Penn West Conference, United Church of Christ  
Refugee Volunteer Coordinator Sarah Aeschliman, West End Mennonite Fellowship  
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Elder Marc Averill, West End Mennonite Fellowship  
Rev. Dr. Marcia Bailey, Calvary Baptist Church, Norristown, Pa  
Reverend Marcia Bailey, First Baptist Church, Pottstown, PA  
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Rabbi Nehama Benmosche, The Benmosche Project  
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Reverend William Bloom, United Christian Church [ucclevittown.org](http://ucclevittown.org)  
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Reverend Curtis Book, Circle of Hope  
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