



News Release

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MCC Speaks Out Against Immigration Bill

January 18, 2012, JEFFERSON CITY, MO – In a Missouri Senate committee hearing on Tuesday, advocates for immigrants voiced their opposition to a bill (SB 590) that would require schools to check students' immigration status and send that information to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Will Kraus (R- Lee's Summit), would also make it a state misdemeanor to not carry registration documents and would allow law enforcement officers upon a stop to determine immigration status if they have reasonable suspicion that the person is unlawfully present.

Only one person came to speak in favor of the bill, while dozens came to speak against it. The Senate's general laws committee, which was hearing testimony, allowed less than an hour for everyone to speak and gave each person who spoke against the bill less than one minute to talk. Even so, everyone who came to speak out against the bill was not able to share their opinion with the committee and little time was left for questions from committee members.

Pat Dougherty testified in opposition to the bill on behalf of the Missouri Catholic Conference and said that not only would the bill impact almost every person in Missouri (as all children would have to show a birth certificate to enroll in school), but the bill would also create divisiveness.

The MCC submitted written testimony to the committee emphasizing the stress this would put on already overburdened school and law enforcement officials.

Vic Lenz, president of the Missouri School Board Association's board of directors who also testified in opposition to the bill, echoed the MCC's sentiment and said the bill would diminish schools' commitment to educate every child and add to administrative burdens.

Others who testified against the bill included a few college students who admitted they were undocumented and said that this bill would create fear among immigrants, documented or not. They indicated that if the bill passes, it might discourage immigrants from trying to get an education if they know they will have to prove citizenship and that they might leave the state.

Enrique Castro, director of the office of Hispanic ministries for the Diocese of Jefferson City, attended the hearing but wasn't able to testify. He said that if the bill passes, it would change the focus of his work and diminish the

way he ministers. He also said it could cause fear and isolation among immigrants and might discourage them from seeking help.

In more in-depth written testimony, the Missouri Catholic Conference stated:

“This legislation punishes everyone—the school parent, the citizen who has a legal driver’s license and may look like an ‘illegal alien,’ the overburdened school principal and law enforcement official and the taxpayer who must foot the bill for this overreaction to concerns regarding undocumented persons. In the end all Missourians lose when a climate of distrust and divisiveness is fostered in our state.”

Catholic teaching recognizes the right of nations to control their borders, but also asserts the rights of persons to migrate who are faced with extreme poverty, persecution and famine. Pope Benedict XVI has observed that “Migration and the problems to which it gives rise must be addressed humanely, with justice and compassion.”

Those interested in tracking immigration legislation in the general assembly can visit the Missouri Catholic Conference’s website at MOcatholic.org.

For more information, please contact Melissa Varner at varnerm@mocatholic.org.