

February 1, 2019

To: Montana House Judiciary Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in opposition to HB 146

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower [B R O W E R] and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak today on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our opposition to House Bill 146.

I think it is first important to note that the Catholic Church supports the rights of sovereign nations to control their borders and does not support or encourage illegal immigration. As a nation, we continue to struggle to find the appropriate policy responses—responses which will provide for public safety while at the same time protect basic human rights and the dignity of all persons, including those here as unauthorized immigrants.

The Catholic bishops of the United States continue to call for comprehensive reform of our legal immigration system and support efforts to address the root causes of migration, such as global poverty. A piecemeal approach is at best insufficient and, at worst, will only serve to exacerbate the current challenges we're facing.

Though perhaps not intended to do so, simply enacting this bill into law could heighten a sense of fear and instability among our small but present unauthorized immigrant population. This, in turn, gives rise to the potential for an erosion of trust and cooperation between immigrants and others within the community. Trust is essential and to increasingly drive unauthorized immigrants into the shadows, however unintended it may be, could have negative consequences.

When it comes to providing for the public safety, local communities, working in conjunction with local law enforcement, are usually best positioned to make the policy decisions that will allow them to most suitably provide for the needs of their populations. The principle of subsidiarity (that principle that says higher groups should not undermine lower groups) can serve as a good guide reminding us that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. House Bill 146 unnecessarily contravenes this principle and erodes local control. Unless local authority has demonstrated an inability to address matters properly under its purview, legislation ought not impinge on the discretion properly afforded to local communities to act in a manner that is both lawful and specifically crafted to best serve the needs of the people in those communities.

The Catholic Church teaches that we are to welcome the stranger and provide for those in need. At the same time, we all desire and seek to build strong and safe communities within which all can thrive. Unfortunately, House Bill 146 runs the risk of hindering rather than facilitating these efforts.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a “do not pass” and thank you for your time.