

January 27, 2021

To: Montana House Judiciary Committee

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

Re: Testimony in opposition to HB 223

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower 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 223.

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.

Unfortunately, when local and state law enforcement are forced to take part in immigration enforcement, it can erode the spirit of trust and cooperation built up between immigrants and those charged with keeping our communities safe. When immigrant populations do not feel comfortable interacting with police, even to report crimes, then entire communities are less safe as crimes and other dangerous situations may go unreported. HB 223 risks upending the delicate balance needed between public safety concerns and legitimate immigration enforcement—a balance that is essential to facilitating safer families and communities.

Immigrants and their families, including those who are here without authorization, shouldn't have to live in fear of the very entities tasked with keeping every person safe and helping our communities thrive. Living in such fear has chilling effects on one's well-being in terms of stability and ability to contribute positively to one's family and society.

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 223 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.