

**Written Testimony Submitted to the Kansas of House of Representatives
Committee on State and Federal Affairs
Regarding House Bill 2576
February 16, 2012**

The Reverend Rick D. Behrens
1501 N. 83rd St.
Kansas City, KS 66112

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. My name is Rick Behrens and I am the pastor at Grandview Park Presbyterian Church in Kansas City, Kansas. Grandview Park Church resides in a neighborhood (Central Avenue) that has gone from desolation and future ghost town status to stable, thriving, energetic and growing. This transformation has largely happened because of an influx of new immigrant populations beginning in the mid 1990's. Along with the neighborhood, our church has been transformed into a vibrant congregation with many children of God who speak other languages and come from a variety of countries and cultures.

On any given Sunday morning I drive the neighborhood in my van to pick up Maria, Jimena, Orlando, Juanito, Brenda, Tom, Ricardo and Johan to name a few. Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday I might be off to take Socorro to the SW Boulevard Medical Clinic. Friday I may be chaperoning our youth to the skating rink. At no point do I ask any of these children of God about their immigration status. We do not ask for papers when a soul finds her way to our front door. Jesus does not check our accents or our ability to speak English when we come to His communion table.

This "harboring" law would make our congregation and myself criminals. We harbor whoever comes through our doors from whatever evil is chasing them down. We do not ask where they are from or what papers they are carrying. We only ask how we can be of help. We ask how we can be good neighbors to another child of God. Should this bill become law, what we do, who we are as God's people, would become illegal in the state of Kansas. Compassion and care extended to our neighbors would become illegal. Should this law pass you would need to go into the business of shutting down churches. We would not be the only church to ignore this law, which would require us to go against our call as Christians. Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35) Over and over and over the Bible calls us to care for the widow, the orphan and the alien or stranger as it is translated in Matthew. We would not be the only church to defy this 'harboring' law to be faithful to Jesus' law of love and welcome. Therefore, you would need to arrest me and many other pastors like me and close down hundreds of churches across the state that welcome people without regard for immigration status.

The larger question behind all these ugly, anti-humane laws is; what kind of state do we want to become? Do we really want a society where people live in fear? Do we want to ask good neighbors to turn against good neighbors and report them? Do we want our children to be suspicious of someone because of their skin color or their language or the fact that they speak with an accent? Do we want to become a state where hospitality is a dirty word and the golden rule is an antiquated idea espoused by a naïve Jewish carpenter? My prayer and my hope is "no". We Kansans are good people who understand hospitality and who love good neighbors who build up our communities. I testify to you that my immigrant brothers and sisters are good neighbors who are making life better from White Cloud to Elkhart. Please say "no".

House Federal & State Affairs

Date:

2-16-12

Attachment #

27