



April 22, 2024

Governor J. Kevin Stitt
2300 N Lincoln Blvd., Suite 212
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Senate President Pro Tempore Greg Treat
Oklahoma Senate
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Speaker of the House Charles McCall
Oklahoma House of Representatives
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd, Rm. 401
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Governor and Legislative Leadership,

We, the undersigned Oklahoma clergy and institutional leaders - members and allies of VOICE (Voices Organized in Civic Engagement) - write in strong opposition to HB 4156 and urge our representatives to seek a better, more constructive approach to immigration policy that promotes safe and strong communities.

We agree with the need for targeted legislation to address crime and the illegal marijuana grow operations that are plaguing Oklahoma's rural areas. However, we need to address that issue in a focused way that targets actual crime. HB 4156, rather than doing that, would primarily impact honest, hard-working immigrant families who contribute in many positive ways to our communities. Please consider:

- It is impossible for law enforcement and other government officials to know by looking whether someone is a citizen, legal immigrant, or here without documents. Without a narrowly defined and focused approach, people who simply look Asian and Latino will be swept up in problematic identifications and actions.
- Immigrants are in fact far less likely to commit crimes than U.S. born citizens. Studies have shown that they are more likely to be employed and have

families.[i] The vast majority of immigrants are good neighbors and upstanding community participants.

- Indiscriminately targeting undocumented people hurts tens of thousands of Oklahoma families. Approximately 170,000 Oklahomans are in mixed status families, where there is at least one undocumented person. 60,000 children live in families with at least one undocumented family member.[ii]

When we talk with law enforcement, we hear about the importance of building trust within communities and about focusing on real crime. When we talk with business leaders, we hear about the urgent need for solid and consistent employees. Instead, HB 4156 would be disastrous for families, church communities, and businesses. The cruelty of this legislation is not in keeping with our Oklahoma Standard, a state that since our beginning has been a community of indigenous and immigrant members.

Let's work together to find a better way forward.

With hope and respect,

Fr. Timothy Luschen, Pastor, St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church

Rev. Don Heath, Disciples Christian Church

Rev. Ray Douglas, Greater Mount Olive Baptist Church

Richard Cheek, Leader, Joy Mennonite Church

Rev. Dr. Lori Walke, Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ

Rev. Jeni Markham Clewell, Mosaic Community Church

Rev. Scott Spencer, Mosaic Community Church

Sr. Diane Koorie, OK Sisters of Mercy/Mercy Associates

Bradley Boxberger, Youth Minister, Church of the Nazarene

Rev. Kayla Bonewell, Church of the Open Arms & Cathedral of Hope

Rev. Dr. Lisa M. Wolfe, Church of the Open Arms UCC

Rev. Trina Bose North, Crown Heights UMC

Rev. Kelsey Cobbs, The Federated Church of Weatherford

Rev. Jack Terrell-Wilkes, Lakeside United Methodist Church

Sr. Pastor Jenny Archer, OKC Evolve

Rev. Dr. Leslie Long, Oklahoma City University

Rev. Valerie Steele, Quail Springs United Methodist Church

Rev. Elvyn Hamilton, Quayle United Methodist Church

Rev. Scott Boeckman, Sacred Heart Church
Rev. Dr. Nerio Espinoza, St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Church
Rev. Cristobal De Loera, St. Peter Catholic Church
Pastor Randall Hill, Western Oaks Christian Church

[i] Ran Abramitzky, Leah Platt Boustan, Elisa Jacome et al. (March 2024). Law-Abiding Immigrants. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 31440. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31440>.

[ii] Phillip Connor. (Jan. 2024). Immigration Reform Can Keep Millions of Mixed-Status Families Together. Fwd.us. <https://www.fwd.us/news/mixed-status-families-1/>