



In Support of H.3269 and S.1305

An Act to protect the civil rights and safety of all Massachusetts residents

Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security

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This bill, also called the Safe Communities Act, provides a number of protections for our vulnerable immigrants and ensures these protections are extended to all communities in the Commonwealth, and is based on the tried and true community policing policies that have served our communities well and given residents confidence in local law enforcement.

Part of the League of Women Voters' vision is to inspire good government and transparency so that government is responsive to the needs of its people. We believe this goal applies to all people living in our country, and, in fact, the League of Women Voters includes non-citizens among its members; we are no longer just women and voters.

The League is particularly supportive of due process protections when DHS/ICE agents interview people who are in jails and prisons, including written consent to be interviewed. Non-citizens are often unaware that they have the right to decline an interview by immigration authorities or to have their attorney present, since Miranda warnings are not constitutionally required for civil immigration violations.

Only statewide legislation will ensure consistent law enforcement procedures. A mishmash of local ordinances and policies provides protections that are dependent on where one is, at home or on a job location, when a crime should be reported or an emergency room visit is required. Immigrants will simply not know the local laws and therefore continue to avoid authorities.

Given the demonizing rhetoric and the federal executive orders to date, Massachusetts cannot assume that because some of our communities do not currently need the protections offered by these bills, those communities will never need them. We do not know what the federal government will propose next.

Many immigrants and their families have become afraid of their local police since the November election. The Los Angeles police chief has said that reports of rape among Hispanic residents have declined by 25%, and reports of domestic abuse have dropped by 10%. Houston police chief Art Acevedo told reporters in April that the number of Hispanics reporting rape is

down 43% from last year. The reason: victims are not coming forward because they fear the police.

The Safe Communities Act would reduce this fear in Massachusetts and let police continue to build trust in their community, vital for community policing. Indeed, Police Chief Brian Kyes of Chelsea, who is also the Legislative Chairman for the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association and the President of the Massachusetts Major City Chiefs Association, explicitly endorsed the Safe Communities Act for that reason.

The United States is a nation of immigrants, and the League of Women Voters has a long history of encouraging their participation in American society. Keeping immigrants safe while within our borders will make them more likely to become active participants in our democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has made “Equality and Justice” one of its top action priorities. The provisions of the Safe Communities Act will go a long way toward providing equality and justice for **all**.