



Testimony in support of

H.2418 /S.1579

An Act to Protect the Civil Rights and Safety of all Massachusetts Residents

Submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security

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The Safe Communities Act, H.2418 /S.1579, would protect the civil rights of all state residents by making sure immigrants are offered due process rights, and local resources are not used towards enforcing federal immigration law. It disentangles federal immigration enforcement from state and local law enforcement.

All persons should receive fair treatment under the law. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a responsibility to ensure the safety of all residents, regardless of their immigration status.

The League of Women Voters supports due process for all persons, including the right to a fair hearing, right to counsel, right of appeal, and right to humane treatment. This bill will ensure both fair treatment of undocumented people and public safety by putting the following protections in place:

- Ensures police and court officials do not inquire about immigration status unless required to do so by law.
- Protects basic rights by ensuring that people in police custody are made aware of their rights and consent to questioning before Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) interviews.
- Creates guidelines limiting when law enforcement and court officials can notify ICE of someone's impending release from custody, such as when a charge is dismissed or a person is released on bail.
- Prevents contracts with ICE that allow county sheriffs and the Department of Corrections to act as federal immigration agents, at taxpayers' expense.

The 215,000 undocumented people in Massachusetts are our neighbors, friends, classmates, and family members. They own businesses, clean our homes, care for our children, and serve our food. They are students in our schools and universities. They pay \$252.5 million in state and local taxes and \$593.6 million in federal taxes. Their total spending power in the Commonwealth is \$4.9 billion.

No one should have to live in a constant state of fear of deportation and family separation. Medical providers and domestic violence advocates have testified to this committee that undocumented people are unwilling to report domestic abuse, wage theft, or seek medical treatment for life-threatening conditions due to fear of deportation. This fear of deportation contributed to a surge in COVID-19 rates as undocumented folks feared that testing, contact



tracing, and vaccines would trigger deportation proceedings. During the height of the pandemic shutdown, mixed status and undocumented families chose hunger over accepting cash assistance due to fear of deportation.

Many local police chiefs are stellar examples of community policing. They do not wish to get involved with ICE for routine traffic stops and do not question people regarding their immigration status. Most police chiefs want to build strong positive relationships with everyone in their communities so victims report crimes. LWVMA believes, however, that we need a uniform statewide policy to ensure civil rights are protected for all, so residents feel safe calling 911, or accessing medical care during a global pandemic, regardless of where they reside or where they work.

The national League supports cities, towns, counties and states that decide not to cooperate with federal deportation and enforcement actions that include non-criminal undocumented immigrants. The Massachusetts League opposes the deputization of state and local police to enforce immigration laws in Massachusetts.

LWVMA, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, and the national League of Women Voters affirm that it is the responsibility of all levels of government to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and housing for all persons in the United States, regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability—or immigration status. The League stands in solidarity with immigrants and our partners in the immigrants' rights community.

For all these reasons, LWVMA supports H.2418 /S.1579 and asks that you favorably report this bill out of committee as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration.