



Public Testimony
House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 5093 (Oppose)
House Bill 5515 (Support)
March 22, 2017

Submitted by The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty

Contact: Emily Jones, Interfaith Coordinator
RIinterfaithcoalition@gmail.com
Office: 401-421-4111, ext. 161

The Rhode Island Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty is a coalition of diverse religious communities and advocacy partners throughout the state who have come together to fight poverty.

Today, we are writing to voice our organization's **strong opposition to House Bill 5093**, which seeks to mandate increased state and local cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Conversely, we express our **support for House Bill 5515**.

We recognize the need for thoughtful immigration reform. However, we do not believe that substantially increased immigration enforcement actions and a general escalation of deportations serves our best interest as Rhode Islanders. These actions **disrupt and destabilize lives, bringing particular harm to low-income immigrant families, congregations and communities**. Further, such actions are in strong contradiction with our values as people of faith.

Requiring state and local police authorities to serve as a de facto extension of federal immigration officers puts an **undue additional strain on both resources and relationships**. It strains resources by requiring that the state and the municipalities use their personnel and facilities for immigration enforcement purposes, regardless of whether increased deportations are judged to serve the interest of that local and/or state community. In addition, House Bill 5093, if enacted, is very likely to worsen the relationship between immigrant communities and the local/state police and other governmental authorities. Relationships between low-income immigrant communities and these local/state authorities are already mistrustful in many places. The duty to share information, honor detainers and report non-enforcement would exacerbate existing tensions while undermining any progress already made and/or planned for the future. This would make all our communities *less* safe, in both the short- and long-term.

The moral teachings of our faith traditions are consistent and clear. Pope Francis, in a message for the 2014 World Day of Migrants and Refugees said, “Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women, and men who leave or are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more.” Pope Francis’ words echo a long, clear tradition that crosses faith lines. Indeed, the words repeat throughout the Hebrew Scriptures: “**You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt**” (Deuteronomy 10:19). This theme continues in Christian Scriptures, in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, with the words, “...**I was a stranger and you welcomed me**” (Matthew 25:35b). The teachings of Islam express similar sentiments: “Those who were already firmly established in their homes and firmly rooted in faith **show love for those who migrated to them**, and harbor no resentment in their hearts for what has been given to them...” (Qur’an 59:9).

Speaking before the United States Congress in 2015, Pope Francis lifted up the best of the American tradition, saying: “We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants.” He goes on to give instruction for the treatment of migrants, encouraging us to “view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories” and to “respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal,” “remember[ing] the Golden Rule.”

As the General Assembly considers the bills before you, we encourage you to look beyond the vitriolic rhetoric of our political moment and to seek, instead, the foundations of your own moral center. Consider the facts, listen to the stories, and make decisions guided by care, wisdom and compassion.

We urge you to **reject House Bill 5093**, and, even further, to take proactive steps forward by **passing House Bill 5515**.

Thank you for your service on this committee.