

May 15, 2018

The Honorable Bill Haslam
Governor of Tennessee
Office of Governor Bill Haslam
State Capitol, 1st Floor
600 Charlotte Avenue
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Request for veto of HB 2315

Dear Governor Haslam:

We, the undersigned 74 domestic and sexual violence advocates and organizations, strongly urge you to veto HB 2315. This legislation would create a chilling effect for domestic violence survivors and other crime victims in the state of Tennessee, discouraging them from reporting crimes to local police for fear that they or their loved ones could end up detained or deported by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials.

HB 2315 would forbid the adoption of local policies that limit entanglement with federal immigration enforcement and require that all law enforcement officers inquire about immigration and citizenship status, on penalty of loss of economic and community development funds. By requiring local and state law enforcement to facilitate federal immigration enforcement, especially following the April 5th raid in Bean Station, this bill would send a clear message to Tennessee's immigrant communities: "You can't trust the police."

As the federal government ramped up threats to detain and deport as many immigrants as possible in early 2017, police departments across the country saw pronounced drops in reporting of serious crime by Latino or Hispanic residents. The Houston Police Department found that in the first three months of 2017, rapes reported by Hispanics were down nearly 43 percent - and other violent crimes reported by Hispanics down 13 percent - when compared to the same period in 2016. The Los Angeles Police Department reported a 25 drop in sexual assault reports from Latinos in the first three months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. In Denver, crime reports from Latinos fell 12 percent in the first three months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. And an April 2017 survey of advocates and attorneys who work with domestic violence survivors across the country found that 78 percent of immigrant survivors told their agency that they have concerns about contacting the police.

We have every reason to believe that the increased entanglement with federal immigration enforcement required under HB 2315 would have a similar impact on crime-reporting by survivors and victims in cities and counties across Tennessee, leaving all of our communities less safe. In fact, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, the Presidential Task Force on 21st Century Policing, Attorneys General from several states, and law enforcement leaders from across the country have all adopted positions or policies opposing law enforcement entanglement with

immigration enforcement, on the ground that it harms public safety. These concerns were echoed by Tennessee law enforcement (see <http://nashvillepublicradio.org/post/tennessee-sheriffs-fear-anti-sanctuary-cities-measure-could-upset-balance>).

According to the Tahirih Justice Center, a national non-profit that works to prevent violence against immigrant women and girls, deterring immigrants from reporting crime can have unintended consequences for U.S. citizens as well. Survivors with U.S. citizen children might remain in abusive situations because they fear separation from their children and even forced loss of custody to their abuser upon deportation.

Policies that seek to distinguish the criminal law enforcement role of local police and sheriff's departments from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's immigration enforcement functions are not only legal – they reflect local best practices for prioritizing safety for all communities. By contrast, measures such as HB 2315 undermine the very purpose of federal laws that aim to encourage crime victims and survivors to work with police.

This legislation would inappropriately overrule local decisions and the discretion of local law enforcement, at the cost of the safety and security of survivors of domestic violence and other crime victims. This is unacceptable. Please veto HB 2315.

Sincerely,

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