



Connecticut Working Families Organization
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March 30th, 2015

Re: Testimony in support of HB 7039 “An Act Concerning Civil Immigration Detainers”

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for holding a hearing on this bill today.

My name is Ana María Rivera-Forastieri and I am the Political Director of the Connecticut Working Families Organization. Working Families organizes on behalf of working and middle class families on social and economic justice issues. We have historically advocated for laws and policies that improve the quality of life of workers and their families.

Working Families is a proud member of the Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance (CIRA), a statewide alliance of organizations and individuals that work to improve the lives of Connecticut’s immigrant community. Since its creation, CIRA has been pushing for greater laws and policies to ensure that our community feels safe. The issue of safety has preoccupied us because throughout the years, the US Government has targeted immigrant communities by creating programs that persecute individuals on the basis of their national origin. Unfortunately, some of these programs have completely relied on our own local law enforcement to instill fear and mistrust in our communities.

But Connecticut has stood up and has sent a clear message in the past that we should not be in the business of breaking families.

CIRA’s first major victory was the passage of the Connecticut Trust Act (2013), which limited the instances in which law enforcement could respond to an Immigration Customs Enforcement hold. The Trust Act was passed unanimously by the Connecticut General Assembly--recognizing that it would promote cooperation between police and immigrant communities, prevent racial profiling and protect Connecticut from liability for unconstitutional detentions of individuals.

Many jurisdictions have followed Connecticut’s lead and enacted laws and policies of their own, but most of these have created stronger protections than our Trust Act. This is a result of changes in federal and local policies as well as settlements in federal courts, and a national call to end programs that blur the line between local law enforcement and immigration authorities.

While an important step, the Trust Act still has some major loopholes that allows for our community to be unjustly targeted and detained.

Immigrants and their families and friends are still afraid to contact the police or even approach a courthouse because they are worried that our local law enforcement will contact immigration authorities. This fear is not unfounded. You have testimony from Mr. Esvin Lima, a young man who reported landlord abuse only to be retaliated against. His landlord accused him of stealing a box of tools and called the police. Despite him having a low bond, which his family and friends could have managed to pay, so he could fight his case outside of jail, he was advised not to pay it because he would have been turned over to ICE. Mr. Lima's case is not isolated; there are many immigrants in our state that face the same situation.

Connecticut can do better. HB 7039 will improve the Trust Act by:

- 1) Stopping all Connecticut law enforcement officers from holding people solely on the basis of an ICE detainer;
- 2) Preventing notification to ICE about an individual's release date; and
- 3) Protecting confidential information, including someone's immigration status

The one change with do suggest to the current bill is that it remove the phrase "who is a subject to a civil immigration detainer" from subsections C and D of Section 1. While the current language is an important amendment, it does not go far enough. Confidential information should be protected, and this should apply to any individual who comes into contact with law enforcement, not just individuals with an immigration detainer. This will enhance law enforcement's ability to obtain necessary and pertinent information by allowing community members to approach law enforcement without fear and thereby building trust and confidence with the community.

We believe that all workers in Connecticut deserve a life of dignity, free from fear and free from oppression, and that believe does not change because of someone's immigration status. While we advocate for workplace policies that will improve the lives of all workers, we must also pay attention and advocate for social policies that affect one's ability to succeed in our country.

For the above stated reasons, we urge this committee to support HB 7039 with the suggested changes to the language.

Thank you.