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Testimony in Support of HB 7039  
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I am writing in strong support of HB 7039, *An Act Concerning Civil Immigration Detainers*. I was very proud to be part of supporting the TRUST act in 2013 and believe that, insofar as HB 7039 continues the progress that we, as a community, made in passing that legislation, that the current bill carries enormous moral, political, and human significance.

In my capacity as a seminarian at Yale Divinity School, I have been privileged to spend the last three years working, in numerous ministry settings around Connecticut, with people of color whose lives have been impacted by this country's racist immigration and policing systems. I have sat with women and men whose immigration status forced to choose between illegally "doubling up" in public housing or living on the street, with people who are already homeless whose papers were stolen while they were in a shelter, with low-wage workers and victims of police brutality who were exploited and mistreated because no one in a position of power would hold their abusers accountable, and with many, many women and men facing deportation and separation from their families. I have witnessed and been a part of incredibly courageous activism in solidarity with these people as they take direct action to fight for their basic human rights. As a Christian, I believe that this activism is the work of the Gospel. But I am also deeply troubled that it was necessary in the first place.

The thousands of hours that activists have put in in this state to defend the dignity of our sisters and brothers of color who are undocumented have been necessary because the function of America's immigration system is fundamentally racist. After decades of free trade agreements and military interventions have created millions of social, economic, and political refugees, the US immigration system constructs these same people as subjects without human rights, as second class citizens in our community. Detention and deportation functions as randomized (but not at all random!) terror that keeps 11 million people in this country living in constant fear that uniformed, gun-wielding state officials will carry them away from their homes, shackle and chain them, and separate them from their families and communities. Every time this happens, it is an act of violence. ***Every deportation is a hate crime.*** The constant terror of deportation is what enables bosses and landlords to continue exploiting undocumented immigrants, a process of exploitation of which low income people of color are the victims and middle and high income white people are the beneficiaries. It is the lynchpin of the whole system. That is why it is crucial that Connecticut law enforcement stop handing immigrants over to be deported.

What the TRUST act was about in 2013, and what HB 7039 is about now, is our community's pledge that we will not stand idly by and benefit from the underpaid labor, overpaid rent, and unchallenged police power brought about by the violence of deportation. It means that we will make our community a sanctuary, and a signpost for the ways in which all of America must eventually be

sanctified. To borrow the words of Fr. Gregory Boyle, it means that we will “stand with the disposable until our society decides that it can no longer afford to keep throwing people away.”

This legislation presents a radical, fundamental option to every legislator in Connecticut, and to all of their constituents as well. The option is this: which side are we on? Do we continue, by our non-action, to cooperate with violence? Or do we refuse to cooperate and, insodoing, take our stand with those who suffer the brunt of white supremacy? Shall we be US citizens, or shall we be human beings?

As a Christian, I believe that this option is presented to us most radically in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Here was a man born of a family that was repeatedly displaced by economic policies (Caesar’s census, Luke 2:1) and military action (Herod’s slaughter, Matthew 2:16-18). He described his mission among Galilean peasants as bringing about the year of Jubilee (Luke 4:19), when slaves would be released, debt forgiven, and land redistributed. He taught us to pray, “Release us from our debts, as we also have released our debtors” (Luke 11:4). His ministry culminated in a March on Jerusalem and an Occupation of the Temple. He was crucified between two insurrectionaries.

Behold the man! Behold God become human in the flesh of a colonized peasant, flesh that bears a striking resemblance to the humanity of 11 million colonized subjects in this country. He stood against indebtedness and taxation, forces that displace, dispossess, exploit, and oppress the colonized in much the same way that detention and deportation do in our community. He was crucified under Eric Holder during the reign of Caesar Obama. In Jesus’ birth we see NAFTA and the war on drugs. In his colonized person we meet every undocumented immigrant, every detainee, and every low wage worker. In his crucifixion we see every border wall and prison cell in America. In his resurrection we see the practice of resistance and the hope and imperative to keep on fighting.

It is in the name of this Jesus that I address you now and appeal to pass HB 7039, to choose the side of history that God has already chosen in Christ the Lord, the side of the exploited and oppressed, the undocumented and imprisoned, not the side of American Apartheid. Continue the good work that you began in passing the TRUST act. Choose humanity, not citizenship, resistance, not oppression, life, not death. May Christ, who reigns in power and glory, find all of us favorable in his sight at the day of his coming to raise up all that is dead and loose all who are bound. And may his Spirit be with you, comrades, in your deliberation, and from this time, until the end of the age.