

To the Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Rev. Paul Fleck and I serve as Pastor of Hamden Plains United Methodist Church and am a leader in the New Sanctuary CT movement. The New Sanctuary movement seeks to provide safe space for immigrants facing deportation, whether it be through accompaniment to ICE check-ins and court hearings, or through physical sanctuary in our houses of worship.

I wish to submit testimony regarding HB 5544, which seeks to decriminalize persons who are immigrants merely for being immigrants. I am a person of faith. My faith compels me to embrace the concept of repentance and redemption. However, there is no redemption in a system that seeks to penalize a person twice: once for their particular misdemeanor and once again for the mere fact of their immigration status.

We have a long tradition in this country against trying someone twice for the same crime. But that's exactly what the criminal-immigration system does. For some it means returning to countries like El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala where drug gangs rule and death is a very real possibility. No one ought to face the death penalty by deportation for a misdemeanor crime.

This bill does not tie the hands of judges or prosecutors. On the contrary, they are afforded nearly the same latitude they would enjoy today to penalize folks for their particular crimes. By not penalizing someone twice for their offense, it would promote more justice, not less.

In closing, I wish to thank the Sentencing Commission for their very reasonable recommendation to this Committee to pass HB 5544. I also thank you for your time and consideration of my submitted testimony.

Sincerely,

Rev. Paul A. Fleck
Pastor, Hamden Plains United Methodist Church
15 Church Street
Hamden, CT 06514
Cell: 203/676-0005