

Statement from Safe & Welcoming Roeland Park

Roeland Park and Johnson County have a history of being unwelcoming to people of color and we continue to grapple with this history today. For example, our city participated in racial covenants for home ownership and a former city attorney attempted tougher criminal penalties for “minorities” and “foreigners”. A recent survey by the city racial equity committee indicates that residents still experience forms of racism today, from being profiled to receiving prejudiced comments. The Safe & Welcoming ordinance was a step towards dismantling this legacy while addressing the real harms of the immigration system in our communities, a system that disproportionately harms people of color . Unfortunately, due to HB2717, the state government has made it that much harder for us to try to undo this legacy.

During our work to make Roeland Park more Safe & Welcoming, our group learned that community members felt unsafe to contact the police when a crime had happened. We learned that the census was not as successful with Spanish speaking residents. We also learned of neighbors that experienced different forms of racial and ethnic profiling throughout Johnson County and Kansas due to being mistaken as foreign born or non-citizen. Testimonies shared by impacted persons were traumatic and unsettling. In response to these concerns, we helped enact an ordinance, approved unanimously by the city council in December 2020, which put limitations on how city staff and police would cooperate with ICE. The ordinance limits cooperation with ICE primarily to assistance with threats to public safety and that which is required by judicial warrant or law only.

For 2+ years, Roeland Park neighbors worked together to make this city more safe, welcoming, and inclusive to those that live, work, shop, and worship here. This movement of about 200 residents, led by a group of neighbors, worked to understand needs, study and recommend policies, gather testimony, and petition our elected leaders to be more inclusive and welcoming to all people. Our cohort included both naturalized and foreign-born residents and we made efforts to center those of us most impacted by this work.

All this work has been undone by HB2717, which rollbacks decisions our elected leaders made to be more inclusive, assuring, and welcoming to all regardless of immigration status. Our city’s attorney has stated that the ordinance is now largely unenforceable due to this law. Like Wyandotte county, whom this bill targets, our ordinance also limits assistance to federal immigration authorities and HB2717 nullifies these efforts.

Our team is still learning how the community will be impacted by all this. For starters, this law impacts those of us most at risk who need assurance and clarity of how the police will enforce immigration law. Per the Missouri-Kansas Chapter of AILA, one unintended consequence is that the law can effectively “deputize” any interested law enforcement person to enforce federal immigration law at will without any oversight. We are concerned about the risk of harm that the law creates for community members.

We hope that our civic leaders will continue to support immigrants, but this new law strips elected officials of the power to provide any legal assurances. Despite this, we remain hopeful

that the Roeland Park community will continue to affirm and support those of us most at risk of harm. For the time being, we recommend all who are able to make a donation to local immigrant support organizations as a way to take positive action ([AIRR](#), [El Centro](#), [KSMODA](#)) . In upcoming elections, please be sure to support the immigrant-friendly candidates who are willing to demonstrate their values in policy and action.

Personal Reactions to Gov. Kelly signing HB2717 into law.

“I was disappointed. I agree that the federal immigration system needs changing. But local lawmakers also have power to reduce the harms of the system. Ultimately, this is another immigration system failure, but this time at the state level.” -Stephanie Iser