



The Advocates for Human Rights supports public policy that ensures Minnesotans can live with dignity.

March 14, 2025

Rep. Duane Quam, Chair
Rep. Mike Freiberg, Minority Lead
MN House of Representatives
Elections Finance and Government Operations

Dear Chair Quam, Lead Freiberg, and Members of the Committee,

The Advocates for Human Rights strongly opposes HF16, which would prohibit separation ordinances and policies. The bill is premised on a fundamental misrepresentation of the purpose and scope of separation policies. It wastes community resources, destroys trust between residents and law enforcement, increases the difficulty in identifying and prosecuting serious criminals like human traffickers, and makes our communities less safe—without any benefit to our state or localities.

Some local governments in Minnesota have separation ordinances or policies that prohibit the collection of immigration status when not legally required and that prohibit the use of local law enforcement resources in actions carried out solely to detect, arrest, or detain a person based on their immigration status. Law enforcement agencies developed these policies to carefully balance important policing priorities: cooperating with federal immigration authorities where required, conserving state resources to spend on state needs rather than federal programs, and ensuring that everyone living in our communities turns to the police if they are the victims of crime.

Though these policies are sometimes called “sanctuary” policies, these governments are not offering sanctuary from immigration law – residents can still be arrested, detained, and deported by federal law enforcement agents. Separation policies are instead about ensuring public safety, the wise stewardship of public resources, separation of federal and state jurisdictions, and community cohesion.

The Advocates for Human Rights is the largest provider of free legal help for people fleeing persecution, torture and trafficking. Our clients include individuals, families, children, and people held in ICE custody. We see firsthand the positive impact of these policies and the negative consequences for individuals, communities, and public safety when the line between federal immigration enforcement and local government gets blurred.

Trust

Safe communities depend on effective state and local public safety agencies and government programs. Effective public safety requires trust-building. When communities do not trust government services, they are less likely to report crime, serve as witnesses, or appear in court. States and local public safety agencies in Minnesota have invested in building trust with dedicated outreach to immigrant communities, using funds to respond to community needs, and creating clear distinctions between themselves and federal immigration enforcement. Demanding state and public involvement in federal immigration enforcement undermines that investment and trust, which makes us all less safe.

- In Minnesota, state and local agencies have dedicated resources to combatting human trafficking, resulting in investigations of and convictions for trafficking, wage theft and exploitation against abusive employers, sex traffickers, and other abusers. These difficult cases hinge on victim cooperation. Traffickers know that fear of deportation is a powerful weapon to silence their victims. When abusive employers threatened immigration consequences, policies that guaranteed protection against retaliation resulted in the first felony charges of wage theft by the MN Attorney General's Office and the first successful labor trafficking conviction by Hennepin County. The Advocates saw the importance of these policies through our work with these victims and agencies. These successes would not have been possible if victims felt they could not cooperate without facing immigration consequences.
- The Hennepin County Chiefs of Police Association has clarified their interests in separation between state and federal immigration efforts. They note, "Effective policing cannot be accomplished without community trust, and that means every person should feel empowered to seek help, report crimes, and engage with local law enforcement. Public safety is eroded and the whole community is put at risk when people fear interactions with local police over their immigration status."¹

Resources

Separation ordinances allow state and local governments to invest limited resources in public safety priorities for their communities. Demanding diversion of state or local law enforcement resources to screen for immigration status, and to

¹ <https://www.minnetonkamn.gov/Home/Components/News/News/1457/3753>

house, hold, report, or arrest individuals for the federal government means they can no longer be used for investigations and prosecutions of crimes that are most harmful to the community.

- Minnesota has invested resources and law enforcement capacity to prioritize human trafficking investigations and prosecutions. Even with this investment, the need outstrips availability. As a result, agents and prosecutors have to make difficult decisions about what cases to pursue, how many resources to devote to them, and how to support victims in the process. In a recent case, The Advocates identified a trafficking victim, but the state agency faced challenges in responding quickly because they did not have adequate resources to send an investigator to the area.
- As federal resources are redirected to immigration enforcement, we have heard from Minnesota law enforcement agencies that they have needed to take over abandoned federal trafficking investigations, putting even more strain on local resources.
- Contrary to political rhetoric, using resources toward immigration enforcement does not increase public safety. Migrant communities are not more likely to commit crimes, so using state and local resources to target public safety criminal priorities while leaving federal civil immigration enforcement to federal authorities is the proven best use of limited resources.

Trafficking

Traffickers and abusive individuals use fear of public officials, especially immigration and police, to force victims to remain in harmful situations. If local law enforcement is required to assist federal immigration enforcement, this will support the claims of the abusers that their foreign national victims will not be able to get help, and that if they try to seek safety, they will be deported.

- The Advocates has served hundreds of trafficked individuals over the past seven years and has seen how traffickers wield threats of immigration enforcement against their victims. In one case, an abusive employer threatened not to renew visas for nearly 100 farmworkers, using that threat to keep them in houses with inadequate heat, as well as forcing them to work without clean water or bathroom breaks and refusing to let them leave the property unaccompanied. In other cases, individuals have brought domestic workers to the US only to force them to work constantly, subjecting them to physical harm and psychological abuse,

but the individuals did not report because the traffickers threatened deportation and harm to their families in home country.

- o Making it more difficult to report trafficking harms our most vulnerable community members and undermines our state's effort to combat exploitation. The Advocates works on cases where children were forced to work in factories, agriculture and street vending by predatory traffickers who refuse to let them attend immigration court hearings, resulting in adverse immigration rulings that traffickers then use to keep children working in exploitative conditions.

Community Life

Thriving societies, like those that MN has worked to create, require that people feel safe participating in daily life. Bringing your kids to school, attending court hearings, calling the police in emergencies, going to work, seeking healthcare, or participating in religious activities should never involve a risk of not returning to family. Communities do not want to live with the ever-present monitoring of public spaces by federal law enforcement. Even when people do not fear immigration consequences, the constant possibility of immigration enforcement chills participation in the community.

Safe and strong communities depend on the ability of all residents to contact law enforcement without fear and on the ability of law enforcement to prioritize the crimes that keep our communities safest. HF16 undermines both goals.

The Advocates for Human Rights respectfully urges the committee to vote no on HF 16.

Sincerely,



Madeline Lohman
Advocacy & Outreach Director
The Advocates for Human Rights