

Opposition to HF 16

Dear Chair Novotny and members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee,

The Legal Rights Center urges members of this committee to oppose the enactment of any bills that endorse or require cooperation with United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the United States Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in support of unjust deportation efforts in Minnesota. HF 16 erodes at the very fabric of our communities' constitutional right to justice.

The Legal Rights Center was founded in 1970 by Black and Indigenous activists as a nonprofit law firm serving low-income communities and communities of color that were and continue to be routinely denied access to true justice. As the needs of those communities have evolved, so has our work. Today, we proudly represent many members of Hennepin County's vibrant immigrant communities.

HF 16 jeopardizes the safety, well-being, and access to justice that community members throughout the state deserve. The actions required in this bill would make community members that are merely charged with – and not yet convicted of – crimes be subjected to deportation, harassment, and, at minimum, a brutal onslaught of fear-mongering and xenophobia. Our community members across the state deserve to exercise their constitutional rights to be “presumed innocent until proven guilty” without the threat of immediate arrest, separation, and detention without protection. Forcing county attorneys to report an undocumented person on the mere suspicion of committing a crime, and making the reporting a requirement regardless of if the county attorney finds enough probable cause to file charges against an undocumented person, is cruel and unusual punishment. This bill will make the work of local law enforcement agents, prosecutors, and judges more difficult as community members will be afraid to leave their homes, more tense and afraid in interactions with justice system stakeholders, and overall less likely to meaningfully participate in their legal cases. This is counter to your charge of ensuring public safety in Minnesota, and instead will only create more danger for both the innocent and those who are victims of crimes.

We as a community must protect those who are the most vulnerable in their time of need. We cannot allow ICE to destabilize our communities, tearing at the pillars of stability, safety, and justice in our legal system. We demand values-aligned leadership from our elected representatives tasked with serving the best interest of all Minnesotans. We ask that HF 16 be rejected by the committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Malaika Eban
Executive Director
Legal Rights Center