



TENNESSEE  
**Immigrant  
& Refugee  
Rights**  
COALITION

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Organizations are listed for  
identification purposes only.

April 26, 2018

Governor Bill Haslam  
State Capitol, 1st floor  
600 Charlotte Avenue  
Nashville, TN 37243

**Re: Request to Veto HB2315, the Mass Deportation bill**

Dear Honorable Governor Haslam,

On behalf of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition and its many members across the state, I write to express our deep concern with HB 2315 and highlight several of its serious defects. The legislation is among the most extreme, state-based immigration proposals in the country. It would severely damage our state's reputation while subjecting the state and local governments to both costly and embarrassing litigation. I respectfully urge you to exercise your constitutional authority to veto this poorly conceived legislation, and prevent it from becoming law.

While presented as a measure to prevent cities from establishing "sanctuary" policies, it actually alters the fundamental relationship between Tennessee law enforcement and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), subordinating local authority to the whim of federal government requests.

Existing state statute already prohibits sanctuary policies and requires that local government agencies comply with federal immigration law. As a result, sheriffs and police in Tennessee do comply with federal detainer requests, and no city in Tennessee has ever established a so-called sanctuary policy. HB 2315 overlooks these facts and seeks to:

- Require all law enforcement officers, even campus police, to inquire about immigration status in routine encounters with community members, without exceptions even for witnesses or victims of crime. The bill explicitly prohibits "any...practice, or policy, whether formally...or informally adopted" that keeps police from "inquiring as to the citizenship or immigration status of any person"; and
- Contort the legal definition of "sanctuary," thereby transforming every request from ICE to detain someone into an unconditional directive, specifically prohibiting localities from asking for probable cause or a judicial warrant before denying an individual his or her freedom, an explicitly unconstitutional mandate.

These new mandates would severely restrict the ability of local police to make common-sense, public safety decisions, and would force local governments to bear the risk and expense of federal immigration enforcement. By requiring all local law enforcement to perform the duties of federal immigration agents, many will not feel safe calling the police, even if they are witnesses or victims of crime, making our entire community less safe.

[WWW.TNIMMIGRANT.ORG](http://WWW.TNIMMIGRANT.ORG)

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The true intent and sentiment surrounding this legislation was revealed during committee debate, as the Senate sponsor invited the anti-immigrant hate group FAIR to testify, and the House sponsor used an ethnic slur to refer to Mexican migrants.

After supporters of the legislation were unable to address the significant legal, practical, and financial issues raised by members, a House committee wisely deferred the measure, voting to send it to the Tennessee Advisory Commission for Intergovernmental Relations for summer review. However, after being strong-armed by House leadership, the committee reconsidered its action and swiftly moved the bill to the floor for final passage.

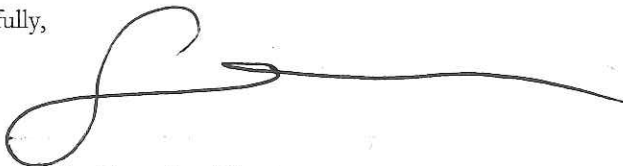
The passage of HB 2315 comes on the heels of the nation's largest workplace raid in a decade, where nearly one hundred workers in a meatpacking plant in Bean Station, Tennessee, were arrested and detained. Employees at the plant reported inhumane treatment and detention despite some having work authorization—a clear violation of the law and basic, constitutional rights. Despite this escalating and egregious behavior by ICE, the Tennessee legislature has just sought to eliminate all safeguards against federal overreach and abuse by turning every request from ICE into an unconditional, legal directive.

Harsh enforcement tactics, such as those witnessed in Bean Station and further encouraged by HB 2315, go against the values of the majority of Tennessee voters. A recent NBC poll found that six out of ten Tennesseans favor federal reform and legalization over the separation of immigrant families. The raid in Bean Station helped Tennesseans and people across the country to understand the true consequences of mass deportation. At least 160 children had a parent arrested or detained in the raid. On the Friday following the raid, more than 500 students were absent from the Hamblen County school district alone. As the nation watches the tragedy and devastation continue to unfold in the Bean Station area, it is unconscionable that Tennessee would move to enact such a sweeping law that would make mass deportation the official policy of the state.

Changing state law to mandate that local law enforcement categorically comply with requests from federal immigration agents that courts across the country have found unconstitutional will make Tennessee among the country's most hostile and unwelcoming states. This bill puts Tennessee on the frontlines of a divisive national debate, and subjects the state to costly legal battles and economic backlash. Abdicating state and local decision-making authority to ICE would make Tennessee a more dangerous place for immigrant families, cementing our national and international reputation as a hostile and unwelcoming place. If HB 2315 were to become law, it would be an unnecessary black mark on the state, and represent a notable departure from the eight years of effort promoting economic development and inclusion.

We appreciate your thoughtful examination of this legislation and consideration of this request, and ask again that you veto HB 2315. If I can answer any questions or provide additional resources to support this request, please contact me anytime.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephanie Teatro', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephanie Teatro, Co-Executive Director  
615-498-8847 | [Stephanie@tnimmigrant.org](mailto:Stephanie@tnimmigrant.org)