

Dear Chair Hall, Vice Chair Ferguson, Ranking Member Humphrey, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee,

Thank you for considering my written testimony in opposition to HB 42, a bill that would jeopardize students' safety by requiring schools to collect and report information about the citizenship and immigration status of those with whom they have contact. Basically, this bill would require schools to report on their own students.

I am a former educator, and have taught at all grade levels. I can only imagine what might happen if, for good reason, families – even citizens – become too afraid to send their children to school or to school activities. I can only imagine how teachers might respond.

We have seen and heard many stories of people being mistakenly detained or arrested due to the government's current deportation push. I have spoken with immigration lawyers who have confirmed mistreatment of those they've been trying to help navigate the system and follow the rules our country has set down. There has been too little concern about providing due process, which is supposed to be a right of all those present in the United States, whether or not they are citizens. When citizens and non-citizens alike cannot depend on their own government to honor due process, fear and anxiety are reasonable responses, and children are being deeply harmed by the uncertainty.

Schools must NOT be forced to report the citizenship and immigration status of the families they serve. Schools should, instead, be a safe haven for children, regardless of their or their families' status. Sadly, even legal American families, especially those of Hispanic heritage, are becoming fearful of sending their children to school. I can only imagine what effect this is having and will have on children's education and mental health if HB 42 passes.

Aside from the impact on at-risk students and their families, HB 42 would also affect their classmates. All children in the classroom will see, hear about, and feel the anxiety of their classmates and friends. As more at-risk families opt, for safety's sake, to take their children out of school, their classmates will be wondering where their friends have gone and why.

They may also worry about their own safety. Already students must endure shooter drills, and teachers are charged with keeping them calm. If I were still teaching, would I be willing to accept an even greater level of responsibility for keeping my students happy and safe while worrying about the impact of a bill such as HB 42?

I urge you not to allow HB 42 to move forward. Schools cannot protect children if the state is forcing them to place their students at risk.

Thanks for your consideration.

Deborah K. Cooper