

CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

June 19, 2019

HB 80: Interested Party Testimony Opposing Provisions Requiring Claimants to Indicate their Legal Status

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairman Hottinger, Ranking Minority Member Craig and members of the Insurance Committee, my name is Jim Tobin. I am an associate director for the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Conference represents the public policy concerns of all the Catholic Bishops throughout Ohio.

We are opposed to the amendment voted on the House floor that adds “immigrant status questions” to the claim forms. We believe that such additions are needlessly provocative, unclear as to implementation, and should be discussed as separate legislative policy rather than part of the Worker’s Compensation budget.

Adding status questions to the Worker’s Compensation form is needlessly provocative. Such questions only focus on the workers and not on the employers who willingly hire such workers. The questions are a step towards denying compensation to all undocumented workers. We believe that Worker’s Compensation coverage should protect all workers, regardless of their status. To have workers who provide the exact service receive unequal protection due to their “legal status” is unjust and may result in more abuses by the few unscrupulous employers who too often exploit undocumented workers.

The amendment regarding legal status was argued to be for “data gathering.” However, the language indicates that claims could be denied due to “false information.” This raises an unanswered question as to whether it is someone’s task at the Worker’s Compensation’s department to pursue the veracity of the “status questions.” It is also unclear as to who would have access to this data and whether it could be used by federal and/or state enforcement officials for deportation purposes. We believe that answers to such questions are complex and should be discussed in separate legislation.

The Catholic community, like so many other faith communities across the state, has many shared experiences with immigrant families throughout Ohio. The Catholic Church has consistently called for meaningful immigration reform. We have urged elected officials to address our country’s broken immigration system through the enactment of comprehensive reform that improves security and creates more legal and transparent paths to immigration.

The Catholic Bishops of Ohio do not condone unauthorized entry into the United States. Yet, once undocumented immigrants are here and working, their human dignity itself should guarantee basic compensation and protections for the work they provide.

In our Catholic teaching, work is first and foremost the very expression of the human person in the world and participation in God’s creation. When someone engages in work for an employer, that person should receive just remuneration and just worker protections. Respecting a person’s human dignity should remain paramount. (Pope St. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, nos. 6, 19, 23).

We respectfully urge you to remove the provisions in HB 80 related to “status questions.”