



January 26, 2022

Senator Walter F. Timilty
Chair, Joint Committee on Public Safety
and Homeland Security
State House, Room 213-B
Boston, MA 02113

Representative Carlos González
Chair, Joint Committee on Public Safety
and Homeland Security
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02113

RE: Testimony in SUPPORT of S.1579 and H.2418, An Act to protect the civil rights and safety of all Massachusetts residents (the Safe Communities Act)¹

Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security:

On behalf of the *Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy (PHRGE)* at the Northeastern University School of Law, I am writing in support of S.1579 and H.2418, the Safe Communities Act. By ending our Commonwealth's voluntary involvement in civil immigration matters, **the Safe Communities Act will promote and protect the human rights of all state residents.**

In early 2017, when the Trump administration began enacting anti-immigrant policies *at the federal level*, PHRGE allocated resources to protecting the human rights of immigrants *at the state and local level*. As part of that mission, PHRGE supported the efforts of the Massachusetts ACLU and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition to promote “safe community” policies in Massachusetts municipalities.² For its contribution, PHRGE provided research showing that between January 2017 and January 2021, 48 Massachusetts municipalities adopted a total of 54 “safe community” policies. (Please see the *Appendix* for a full list of these policies.) In other words, **dozens of municipalities throughout Massachusetts have already endorsed the principles embodied in the Safe Communities Act.**

These municipal “safe community” policies manifest widespread support for Massachusetts immigrants. During the relevant time period, Massachusetts residents in 36 towns gathered at Town Meetings to enact “safe community” proclamations, resolutions, and bylaws; 11 city councils passed “safe community” ordinances or resolutions; and two mayors issued “safe community” declarations. The municipalities that adopted these policies are geographically

¹ This testimony does not represent the views of Northeastern University.

² The Northeastern University School of Law also supports the immigrant communities of Massachusetts through its *Immigrant Justice Clinic* and other initiatives providing direct representation and legal advice.

diverse; they represent 10 of the 14 counties in Massachusetts. “Safe community” policies were adopted in cities such as Boston, Cambridge, Easthampton, Greenfield, and Springfield — and in towns such as Amherst, Aquinnah, Arlington, Brookline, Falmouth, Great Barrington, Lexington, Wayland, and Westhampton.³

More than 90% of these municipal “safe community” policies include provisions that seek to reduce voluntary collaboration between local police officers and federal immigration-enforcement officials. Relevant provisions include (1) prohibitions on local police officers inquiring into the immigration status of municipal residents unless required by law, (2) prohibitions on local police officers performing the functions of federal immigration officers, (3) prohibitions on the use of municipal resources for federal immigration enforcement, and (4) statements of support for the Safe Communities Act.

The recent adoption of “safe community” policies in so many Massachusetts municipalities is a sign that our Commonwealth is more than ready for the Safe Communities Act — and that the time has come to provide the protections embedded in the Safe Communities Act to all immigrants living in the Commonwealth. I respectfully urge you to report this bill favorably out of committee as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Ennen, J.D., Ph.D.
Director, Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy
(PHRGE)
Northeastern University School of Law
214 Knowles Center
360 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115
e.ennen@northeastern.edu

³ In Massachusetts, municipal support for protecting the human rights of our immigrant neighbors extends beyond the 48 municipalities that adopted “safe community” policies during the Trump administration. Several Massachusetts municipalities, such as Chelsea, Holyoke, Lawrence, and Northampton, enacted related policies prior to January 2017. (Some of the municipalities that had adopted relevant policies before January 2017 strengthened their policies during the Trump years. Boston, Brookline, Cambridge, and Somerville fall into this category and are included in the group of 48 municipalities that adopted policies between January 2017 and January 2021.) Furthermore, some Massachusetts municipalities have not adopted “safe community” policies because their police departments, through custom or protocol, already endorse the principle that communities are safer if local police departments do not become entangled in federal immigration enforcement.