



The Massachusetts Chapter

June 9, 2017

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

S.1305 & H.3269 “An Act to Protect the Civil Rights and Safety of all Massachusetts Residents.”

My name is Nicole de Paz, M.D., I am a 1st year resident at Massachusetts General Hospital for Children. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Massachusetts Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP), which represents approximately 1,800 pediatricians across the Commonwealth, in support of S.1305 & H.3269. The members of the MCAAP are physicians dedicated to improving the quality of life for children by providing quality health care and advocating for them and their families. The MCAAP is committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental and social health for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

Massachusetts should enact S.1305/H.3269, the Safe Communities Act, which would prevent local law enforcement agents from acting in an immigration enforcement capacity, and instead allow them to focus on keeping our communities safe from criminal activity.

Over 5 million children in the U.S., many of whom are U.S. citizens, live in families with undocumented immigrant parents. National policy to increase deportations of undocumented immigrants has created fear among children that their parents will be deported, and community distrust of local law enforcement.

As pediatricians, we bear witness to the physical and mental health harms facing children of undocumented parents who live in fear of deportation. Children whose parents are subject to deportation have been shown to experience mental and emotional health problems including sleeping and eating disturbances, anxiety, depression, poor school performance, and other types of distress. Forced separations due to immigration enforcement can also result in a child’s household losing a working parent, which has been shown to threaten family housing and food stability, two critical components of child health.

When communities associate local law enforcement with immigration enforcement, they cannot trust their police officers to protect them, and thus criminal activities go unreported and unpunished, and victims are left without recourse.

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Children sense this distrust, and it impacts how they view law enforcement and their own sense of safety, which can have a negative impact on our communities.

S.1305 & H.3209 would ensure that police resources are used to fight crime, not separate families. When police become ICE agents, immigrant victims and witnesses of crimes are afraid to call police, which makes us all less safe.

The MCAAP urges the Committee to give the Safe Communities Act a favorable report.