

HB 20-1294 Replacing the Term “Illegal Alien” with “Undocumented Immigrant as it Relates to Public Contracts for Services

Good afternoon Chairman Foote and committee members. My name is Jean Nofles, volunteer state president for AARP of Colorado and its 680,000 plus members in Colorado.

AARP strongly supports this bill, HB20-1294.

Sticks and stones might break my bones, but words will never hurt me. This childhood slogan, intended to protect us from bullying, sounds catchy... but it is not true. Words matter and words can hurt.

Words and phrases can be hostile. They can alienate, demean, intimidate, bully, be divisive and otherwise provoke discord among people.

The phrase, “illegal alien” is one of those phrases. The legislation guiding public contracting can be just as effective using a less inflammatory phrase, a phrase such as, “undocumented immigrant”.

Indeed, NONE of our public facing documents need contain language hostile to any group of people, including immigrants.

Might I add that, during this time of budgetary strife, this bill has no fiscal note. A mere change of terms in the state’s contracting documents will demonstrate that the state understands the need for respect and civility in public contracting.

Thank you, Senator Gonzalez, for sponsoring this bill.

AARP is an inclusive organization working to improve the lives of older people, and in doing so, improves the lives of us all...including undocumented immigrants.

We strongly support this bill and encourage you to vote a resounding “YES” for its passage.

Thank you for listening.

Thank you Representative Lontine for bringing forth this bill.

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My name is Feven Enkuselasse, I am an immigrant justice organizer with Colorado People's Alliance, and I represent a membership of over 300 Coloradans, many of whom are immigrants. I am submitting testimony in support of HB20-1294, to replace the usage of the term "illegal alien" with "undocumented immigrant" in public contracts. As a black woman and an immigrant myself, I am all too familiar with the usage of derogatory language being used toward both of my identities since I was a child. I find the usage of the term "alien" to be indistinctive from language used to strip black people of their sense of humanity, sense of worth, and sense of belonging. An "alien" certainly is not "human", and the usage of the term, no matter in what context, makes the distinction between alien and human quite clear. What does it mean when the state of Colorado formally and publicly refers to human beings, regardless of their citizenship status, as anything other than human? What kind of violence does it subject those who are deemed "alien" to? What injustices are justified because the language of the government itself has made this distinction? We have seen historically that language that otherizes people is only one part of a series of atrocities committed upon marginalized groups. "Alien", no matter the context, functions similarly, even if used in seemingly innocuous or mundane public contracts. I support the replacement of the phrase "illegal alien" to "undocumented immigrant" not only because the phrase is offensive, but also because it is needless and serves no purpose in public contracts. It does little to make public contracts clearer, or more functional, but it does a world of damage to undocumented and immigrant communities by its use. The usage of the phrase in public contracts or other governmental processes undoubtedly encourages the usage of the phrase in derogatory manners by the public, by children against other children in schools, or by adults when a minority person (immigrant or not) is walking down the street. Its existence in public contracts is useless and violent, and whether the state of Colorado intends it to be or not, can be utilized for racist rhetoric. I urge the committee to pass HB20-1294 to protect immigrant communities from the violent potential of the phrase "illegal alien".

Feven Enkuselasse

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