

The General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church
House Immigration Subcommittee Hearing
Thursday, July 23, 2015

The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) grieves with the family of Kathryn Steinle who was killed as a result of senseless gun violence. We continue to pray for an end to gun violence, which has sadly become an epidemic in the United States. GBCS urges all Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to refrain from conflating the actions of one person with an entire community of our immigrant brothers and sisters. Congress should instead search for real solutions to the problems of gun violence.

Every day 89 people die from gun violence in the United States. In 2015 alone, there have been over 180 mass shootings, defined as killing or wounding two or more people in one incident. This includes the tragic gun shooting in Chattanooga, TN on July 16 where four marines were killed.

We are pleased Congress finally wants to respond to the acts of senseless gun violence and so we strongly encourage members of Congress to pass universal background checks on all gun purchases as a way to begin to take seriously their responsibility to keep the public safe from gun violence.

Demonizing the immigrant community, however, for the actions of one person is misguided. Penalizing cities that are working to establish trust between immigrant communities and the local police is an overreach by the federal government and will only damage local communities. Many cities recognize how requests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to hold individuals beyond their court-appointed sentences violate due process and have been found unconstitutional by federal courts. Choosing not to honor ICE detainer requests without probable cause or a signed warrant from a judge is constitutional.

It also actually improves public safety by increasing community trust in its police force. When all individuals can report dangerous situations without the fear of being deported and separated from their families, safety is increased for all community members. When local police collaborate with ICE, more crimes go unreported because victims and witnesses are afraid of being deported if they contact the police.

The General Board of Church and Society opposes proposals that would infringe on the rights of states, cities, localities and police departments as to how they interact with ICE. We oppose the following pieces of legislation:

- H.R.3002, The Mobilizing Against Sanctuary Cities Act;
- H.R.2964, The Clear Law Enforcement for Criminal Alien Removal (CLEAR) Act;
- H.Amdt 352 offered by Rep. Steven King (IA-4) to H.R. 2578,
- The FY16 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Act; S.80 introduced by Senator Vitter (R-LA);
- The Sanctuary Cities Amendment offered by Sen. Cotton (R-AR) to S.1177, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

These proposals would do more harm than good. They do not address the epidemic of gun violence affecting the United States.

There are 320 jurisdictions across the United States with policies that limit collaboration with ICE. These jurisdictions should not be punished for exercising their own judgment.

We urge Congress to take responsible action to reduce gun violence and to refrain from demonizing immigrant communities or penalizing local communities from determining how best to provide public safety for their communities.