

April 2, 2019

The Honorable Representative Jennifer Williamson, Chair
House Judiciary Committee Members

RE: HB 2932

My name is Julia Gies. I am a retired nurse, living in Washington County. Since my retirement, I have volunteered with ACLU as a legal observer at the Washington County Courthouse.

I whole-heartedly support HB 2932. Every person in our state should have the same access to justice in our courts, regardless of immigration status.

However, I have heard a judge announce to a defendant in open court, "Do you understand that, because you are undocumented, you may be subject to deportation if you enter a plea in this case?" Unfortunately, the Washington County Courthouse is not off-limits to Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) officers. There were several ICE officers there on that day.

My reading of HB 2913 is that it prohibits inquiring into a defendant's immigration status, but does not actually prohibit a member of the court referencing a defendant's immigration status, if known, in open court.

Therefore, I am suggesting a small amendment to HB 2932 that would prohibit a judge or any member of the court from acknowledging a defendant's immigration status, if known, in open court. I hope you will consider this proposed amendment during the Committee's work session on April 3rd.

Respectfully yours,
Julia Gies
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