

Statement to the House Judiciary Committee  
In Support of HB 4121  
February 3, 2020

Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Kellems and I live in Hood River County. I have lived in Hood River for 10 years and in the Columbia Gorge for 18 years. I am here today to express my support for HB 4121.

Over the past three years, I have been part of local efforts to raise awareness around the holding of immigrant detainees at our local jail, NORCOR, through the contract NORCOR has with ICE. My former work with immigrant students and families in early childhood education gave me first-hand experience of the fear that our immigrant community members live with when they know ICE has a regular presence in our region.

This fear means that many community members do not feel comfortable raising concerns to those in positions of power and influence. This fear also means that community members are less likely to report crimes they witness or are victim to. In this way, their fear makes our community less safe for everyone. I believe this fear would be greatly diminished if ICE were not housing detainees in our local jail.

In 2017 and 2018, I repeatedly addressed the Hood River City Council and Hood River County Commission at their regular public meetings regarding this issue. After several months of discussion and deliberation, in the spring of 2018 the Hood River City Council shared a Statement of Concern with the Hood River County Commission around the contract NORCOR has with ICE.

I met individually with several county commissioners to discuss my concerns, and learned that they wished to end the ICE contract, however with the current financial situation of Hood River County, they did not see a viable alternative to the revenue received from this contract. I pledged to become actively involved in working toward solutions for our county's financial stability as well as toward a future that will better align our policies with our values.

In the spring of 2019, I had the opportunity to work with the Safe & Healthy HRC PAC in support of proposed Hood River County ballot measures to raise revenue for essential county services. Through this PAC, I worked with two of our county commissioners, the sheriff, and a representative from the City and County Employees' Union, among others. Although last year's ballot measures did not pass, I am encouraged by increasing awareness in our community and by the dialogue I have witnessed between County Commissioners, staff, and community members.

I am further encouraged by the work of Representatives Bonham and Williams, as well as Commissioner Schwartz, Molly Rogers, and other members of the NORCOR board to seek state funding for our jail in exchange for an end to the ICE Contract. I hope you will support HB 4121 today as an investment in the present and future safety of our rural communities in the Columbia River Gorge.

Thank you for your time and your service.



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