

Institutions and Response:  
Tennessee Immigrants in Schools, the Carceral System, and the Streets

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### Introduction

This paper addresses challenges faced by Tennessee immigrants in the 2000s, focusing on Latino immigrant communities in the aftermath of the 2005 Sensenbrenner Bill. The large increase of immigrants and their children living in Tennessee—from 1.2 percent of the state’s population in 1990 to 4.8 percent in 2011—has been met by a variety of institutional responses, both positive and negative. Our paper examines how the K-12 school system and the carceral system have affected the lives of immigrants and their children, and how immigrants have responded to barriers and occasional opportunities presented by these institutions. Additionally, we outline political responses of the immigrant community and identify new venues for immigrant mobilization in response to the Trump administration’s immigration policies.

Although new destination migration to the US Southeast began in earnest in the nineties, substantial immigration to the state of Tennessee lagged behind that of its neighboring states of North Carolina and Georgia. However, as Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina have pursued increasingly aggressive anti-immigrant policies, foreign-born Latinos and Asians have migrated to less overtly-hostile states, including Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1990, the foreign-born population of Tennessee was 1.2 percent of the state’s population, rising to 302,000 (5 percent) by 2013, according to official statistics, which undercount the true size of the population by as much as forty percent. In all, Tennessee’s foreign-born population grew by over 300 percent from 1990 to 2010, as did that of six other states, and Tennessee is one of 16 states in which the proportion of foreign born has risen by one third or more (NAP 2017). The overwhelming majority of Tennessee’s immigrants have settled in six counties, two of which are anchored by Nashville and Memphis.

Like other immigrants, Latinos came to Tennessee and other parts of the “New South” for its relatively high economic growth and low cost of living compared to other regions, as well as diminishing opportunities in traditional gateway states (Durand, Massey, and Capoferro 2005; Gouveia and Saenz 2000; Marrow 2005). Settling in small towns and big cities across the state, new workers found employment in poultry and other food processing plants, as well as auto manufacturing and crop production (Nagle et. al. 2012). In general,

influential manufacturing industries have restructured, increasing demand for low-wage, low-skill labor in the rural South . . . Technological change has enabled these production processes to become more routinized and has reduced the skill-level required of workers. Firms have thus increasingly located in rural areas in the South and Plains states to take advantage of lower land and labor costs and lower union presence (Nagle et. al. 2012, 20).

Immigrant families in Tennessee appeared less hurt by the Great Recession than some others. Although Latino workers in the South did experience rising unemployment rates before the rest of the economy, the rise in unemployment traced to the Great Recession was less severe among Latino workers. Latino workers in the South now experience lower unemployment rates than the general population. But Latino workers may have more quickly returned to work because they are willing to compromise with employers by working fewer hours and for lower wages (Nagle et. al. 2012).

The rest of this paper provides an examination of immigrant families and children in their interactions with school systems and the carceral system, as well as an on-the-ground accounting of political and community organizing to protect immigrants in Tennessee. What we find most striking is how local actors, both immigrants and advocates, have consistently tried to check the actions of federal and state policymakers. At times those actors have included local elected officials, which further provides a contradictory context for policy and resistance.

## Schools

The Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) that all children residing in the United States, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status, have a guaranteed right to free public K-12 education. However, a right to education does not always translate to equal access to high-quality education or to equitable outcomes, especially with regard to immigrant children. Students with limited English proficiency, identified as English Language Learners (ELLs), trail behind English proficient students in math and reading (Bohon and Conley 2015), and children from immigrant families are often further disadvantaged by lower levels of parental involvement compared to children of the US-born (Gonzalez et al 2013). In new destinations, immigrant children and their families confront a variety of institutional barriers, including lack of bilingual and bicultural school personnel, lack of in-language resources for families, and inadequate ELL curriculum (Bohon, Macpherson, and Atilas 2005; Singer 2004).

Already overburdened school systems are often ill prepared to accommodate the needs of immigrants or children of immigrants. Without significant policy changes, this problem will be exacerbated in Tennessee, where a population boom of Latino children has already taken place. Within the next three to five years, ten percent of all Kindergarteners in Tennessee will be Latino. These children are more likely to come from homes in poverty and live in high linguistic isolation. Among children ages 5-9, 36 percent live in families in which there is no one over the age of 13 who speaks English well. This rises to 44 percent among children age 0-4 (Nagle et. al. 2012). Following the influx of unaccompanied children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in 2013 and 2014, an investigation conducted by the *Associated Press* revealed that immigrant children in Tennessee and thirteen other states had been systematically denied enrollment in their neighborhood schools, kept out of school for extended periods due to excessive paperwork, and deflected to alternative education programs (Garance and Sainz 2016).

Although the Supreme Court's ruling in *Plyler v. Doe* upholds access to public K-12 education, it does not guarantee a right to attend public institutions of higher education. And yet, while the rising costs of tuition make college unattainable for many students—regardless of

their citizenship and immigration status—undocumented and *DACAmented*<sup>1</sup> youth in Tennessee confront additional barriers upon graduation from high school. Unlike states such as Florida and Illinois, which provide in-state tuition to undocumented students and DACA recipients, undocumented and *DACAmented* students in Tennessee pay out-of-state tuition, which can be as much as two- to three times higher than in-state tuition.<sup>2</sup> Despite support from the Tennessee Board of Regents—the governing board of the state’s university and community college system—and from Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam, Tennessee has yet to follow the trend of the more than twenty states that have enacted legislation or policies to authorize in-state tuition for undocumented students and/or DACA recipients (Hooker et al. 2015). Noting the inevitable outcome of this denial, Memphis Regent Barbara Prescott stated, “When we do not allow in-state tuition to these undocumented students we really are denying them access” (Tamburin 2017).

At the federal level, undocumented and *DACAmented* immigrants are prohibited from receiving federal grant money for higher education. However, states like California and Texas extend state financial aid and other resources to these students (Hooker et al. 2015). The state of Tennessee offers a number of aid programs to reduce the cost of higher education, including Tennessee Promise, which was championed by Governor Haslam and which extends two years of free higher education to all residents of the state, and the Hope Scholarship, which provides financial awards to residents to offset the costs of public higher education. The requirements for these programs preclude access for undocumented or *DACAmented* youth, as neither undocumented nor *DACAmented* students qualify as residents of the state of Tennessee, as a result of their status, regardless of how long they have lived in state.

Aside from institutional barriers, access to education for immigrant children is limited by real or perceived threats of immigration enforcement. For example, after the 2011 passage of

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<sup>1</sup> *DACAmented* students are those who have qualified for, and received, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), President Obama’s 2012 executive order granting temporary legal status and work authorization for certain unauthorized immigrant youth. Although DACA youth are technically “documented” for the purposes of employment and obtaining a driver’s license, they often refer to themselves as *DACAmented* to signify that their status is dependent on the whims of the executive branch and that they do not have the same rights as immigrant visa holders, such as the right to travel abroad.

<sup>2</sup> Tennessee only allowed in-state tuition to US-born Tennessee-resident children of unauthorized immigrant parents in 2014.

HB 56 in Alabama, which, among other things, mandated that school administration collect information on the citizenship and immigration status of newly enrolling children, superintendents across the state noted a higher than usual rate of student absences, and newspaper articles indicated that an estimated two thousand Latino children across the state stayed home from school in the days immediately following implementation of the law (Gomez 2011; Robertson 2011). The same phenomenon is happening across the nation today. Rumors of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and checkpoints in the wake of Donald Trump's 2017 executive order on interior enforcement, which significantly expanded priorities for removal,<sup>3</sup> have unsettled immigrant families, and school districts report substantial impacts on the attendance of immigrant children (Samuels 2017).

The implementation memorandum<sup>4</sup> for Trump's executive order, issued February 20 by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary John Kelly, raised additional uncertainties of how Trump's priorities would be interpreted, practically speaking, in terms of enforcement activity in schools. Kelly's memorandum rescinded "all existing conflicting directives, memoranda, or field guidance regarding the enforcement of our immigration laws and priorities for removal." For many, the statement referred to more than past directives on prosecutorial discretion<sup>5</sup> and Secure Communities.<sup>6</sup> Of particular concern was the apparent termination of the sensitive locations memo, which, under the direction of former ICE Director John Morton, established that ICE would not conduct arrests, interviews, searches, or surveillance for the purpose of enforcement at certain places deemed to be "sensitive" community locations, such as institutions of worship, hospitals, and schools—including

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<sup>3</sup> Trump's (2017) order prioritizes those who: a) have been convicted of any criminal offense; b) have been charged with any criminal offense, where such charge has not been resolved; c) have committed acts that constitute a chargeable criminal offense; d) have engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation in connection with any official matter or application before a governmental agency; e) have abused any program related to receipt of public benefits; f) are subject to a final order of removal, but who have not complied with their legal obligation to depart the United States; or g) in the judgment of an immigration officer, otherwise pose a risk to public safety or national security.

<sup>4</sup> Implementation memos explain and elaborate executive orders, particularly with regard to their practical application within pertinent federal departments.

<sup>5</sup> ICE Director Morton's (2011) memo on prosecutorial discretion, and former DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson's (2014) memo on expanded discretion, prioritized: threats to national security, "criminal aliens," recent entrants, entrants with prior removals; and those who failed to leave after ordered departed.

<sup>6</sup> Secure Communities, a program started and discontinued under the Obama administration, increased interoperability between state and local law enforcement agencies (LEAs), the FBI, and DHS.

preschools, primary and secondary schools, universities, and vocational schools (Morton 2011). This, combined with Secretary Kelly's statement that DHS would no longer "exempt classes or categories of removable aliens from potential enforcement" and Trump's campaign statements on DACA, raised concerns that ICE would not hold back from targeting undocumented youth, even while they were physically in school.

After days of confusion, DHS affirmed that guidance on immigration enforcement in sensitive locations would remain in place. Nevertheless, examples from the news suggest that ICE is not following the "spirit" of their own policy on sensitive locations, given the recent arrests of unauthorized immigrants as they left a church hypothermia shelter in Alexandria, Virginia (Hernandez 2017) and the arrest of Romulo Avelica Gonzalez immediately after dropping his daughter off at her Lincoln Heights school in Los Angeles (Castillo 2017).

Although Tennessee has not, to our knowledge, experienced any violations of the sensitive locations memo, Tennessee's students have not been immune from immigration concerns. Following the election of Donald Trump, students and educators have experienced a number of disturbing incidents, including the following:

- Immigrant and minority students in a minority-majority school report such microaggressions as white students chanting "Trump Trump!" at them as they pass by in the hallway;
- A student received a death threat via text during class from the gang he fled Honduras to escape. The student has a pending asylum hearing but, due to recent changes in asylum policy from the Trump administration, the student is afraid to attend his upcoming court date, lest he and his family be immediately detained and/or deported. The teacher has received no guidance on how to address these issues, and reports that she does not know whether to counsel the student to attend the asylum hearing or avoid it.
- Another teacher reports that her students, many of whom are undocumented, have repeatedly asked whether they and their undocumented parents would be safer if they did not come to school, since they may be risking contact with immigration enforcement by leaving their homes.

Educators and immigrant advocates across the state of Tennessee are deeply concerned about students' access to education, and they have pursued a variety of tactics to address institutional, social, and legislative barriers to schooling at both K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. Following the 2017 presidential election, the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) pushed for, and won, a school board resolution from the Metropolitan Nashville Davidson County Board of Public Education affirming that the Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) system is a "safe zone" for students and families "threatened by immigration enforcement and targeted by bullying." Approved on December 13, 2016, the resolution declares its

intent to work with the director of schools to develop robust policies, protocols, and systems that designates all K-12 schools, early education centers, adult schools, and parent centers as 'safe zones' for students and their families to ensure equal access to education regardless of their immigration status.

That the resolution signals *intent*, instead of enumerating a direct and timely course of action, has not been lost on educators and community organizers in Knoxville, who are currently developing their own school board resolution. In fact, community leaders in Nashville now find themselves pushing for concrete measures to implement their safe zone policy (Haggard 2017). In Knox County, the task of creating a school board resolution has been taken on by an organization of educators called Kindred Futures, a group recently born out of membership from Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN) for the purpose of working on matters pertaining to unauthorized immigrant students and their families. Currently in draft form, the proposed resolution would compel Knox County Schools to provide in-language "know your rights" (KYR) training for students and families, require mandatory training for school staff,

especially front-office personnel, on immigration-related matters, and prohibits the sharing of students' personal information without a judicial warrant or the permission of parents.<sup>7</sup>

Educators have also pushed for proactive steps to broaden awareness of immigration-related matters among students, parents, educators, and administrative staff, such as expanded anti-harassment policies and in-service training. While many school administrators have downplayed incidents of harassment experienced by students in their schools and communities, stating their preference to address incidents as they arise, in piecemeal fashion, others have approached these issues straightforwardly. At one high school in Knox County, the head principal, noting a disturbing number of student absences in recent weeks, issued a letter to all parents in English, Spanish, and Arabic affirming, "We would like to assure you that [our school] is a safe space for students. We never give out personal information to anyone and we work hard to make sure that everyone, regardless of race, nationality, or documentation is welcome."

In other schools, teachers are left to their own devices to educate themselves on immigration law and to comfort and provide aid to their students in the face of interpersonal hostility from other students and the omnipresent fear of immigration enforcement. On an individual level, for example:

- Multiple teachers have vowed to sneak students out of the school if ICE enters; others have declared that ICE would have to arrest them first before they could get to their students;
- One teacher serves as the emergency contact for all of the undocumented students in her class as well as those with undocumented parents;
- Another teacher has completed legal paperwork to become a student's legal guardian should the parents be deported.

Notable is the distinct responses of schools and their correlation to the makeup of the student population. For example, teachers in schools in the Knox County neighborhoods of Lonsdale, Norwood, and Bearden, all of which have sizeable immigrant and/or minority populations, have

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<sup>7</sup> FERPA enables schools to share information with select designated entities, including law enforcement, without the permission of parents and without requiring parents to be notified.

been at the forefront of providing resources to families and pushing for responses from administrators, the school board, and other public officials.

In one such example, the Lonsdale community school<sup>8</sup> partnered with Centro Hispano and AKIN in the wake of the 2016 presidential election to offer KYR training, a discussion of what the new presidential administration would mean for immigrants and their children in the school, and a session on how to talk to children about their fears and anxieties related to immigration enforcement. In 2017, following the executive order on interior enforcement, these discussions have broadened, at the insistence of educators, to address the concrete needs of families as they prepare for the potential of enforcement activity and removal. For example, a recent program hosted by Kindred Futures and held at a Knox County high school offered assistance with family emergency preparedness. The program, which attracted more than 40 families and 100 children, offered families the opportunity to organize, prepare, and notarize documents related to medical and school records, temporary guardianship for children in the event of a parental removal, and power of attorney for assets such as bank accounts and homes. Similar events are scheduled for schools across the county, though they are not officially sanctioned by Knox County Schools. In the absence of prosecutorial discretion at the federal level and state or local policies of non-cooperation with federal immigration authorities, educators have turned their organizing capacity to providing action plans for families that may be impacted by deportation.

Other actions are taking place to expand immigrant access to higher education. For several years, TIRRC has mounted a consistent legislative push for “tuition equality.” In 2017, after multiple previous failures, yet another tuition equality bill (SB1014 / HB0863) bill was reintroduced in the Tennessee legislature by Republican Senator Todd Gardenshire of Chattanooga and Republican Representative Mark White of Memphis. If passed, the legislation would enable governing boards of public universities to use discretion in exempting individuals from paying out-of-state tuition provided that the student has graduated from a Tennessee high school or obtained a GED. Still, the legislation would not extend state aid—like Tennessee Promise or the Hope Scholarship—to undocumented or DACAmented students. The current

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<sup>8</sup> Community Schools are a Knox County initiative to make K-12 schools a centralized source of community resources, providing on-site medical and dental services, academic enrichment programs, and cultural events.

need for constituent involvement in legislative action on tuition equality, as well as other pressing issues related to immigration, has caused the Kindred Futures to delay its push for a Knox County school board resolution.

### **The Carceral System – From the legislature to the police**

With increasing political attempts to criminalize immigration, the carceral system's profile has increased significantly in Tennessee. The substantial impacts of this system upon immigrant children and the children of immigrants are obvious. Approximately 5.1 million children in the United States live with at least one unauthorized immigrant parent, and 20 percent of those children are themselves unauthorized (Capps, Fix, and Zong 2016). Children are witnesses of enforcement action against parents, suffer from discriminatory policies, share the household fear of police, and often avoid contact with police even when faced with danger. The escalation in real or perceived threats of immigration enforcement under the new administration is not lost on children, who are already experiencing heightened levels of anxiety (Kamenetz 2017).

One story illustrates poignantly the impact of these threats on children in Knoxville, Tennessee. On a Tuesday morning in March 2017, a young child reported to her teacher that her neighborhood—a small community occupied predominantly by single mothers, all unauthorized immigrants, and their mostly US-born children—had been terrorized the previous night by several unknown men. Simultaneously, another resident of the community reached out to the second author of this paper. As a steering committee member of AKIN, and a facilitator of the group's rapid response network, Meghan organized a team to verify and document the events of the previous evening. Overnight between Monday and Tuesday, for a period of three hours, a group of four men had occupied the neighborhood, banging on doors and windows, rifling through mailboxes, photographing license plates, and attempting to gain entry into the homes. Not a single family in the community called the police; in fact, many assumed that the men terrorizing their community were members of local law enforcement and/or immigration enforcement. The children of the community were aware of the events as they happened, and were terrified that their mothers would be taken; many of the mothers,

themselves panicked by the experience, were wary of sending their children to school the next morning, lest they be taken while the children were away, leaving no one to care for them.

It is easy to see why immigrant families would be fearful of law enforcement given the context of Tennessee's approach to immigration matters. For example, in 2006, the Tennessee Highway Patrol was trained to enforce immigration law. Later that year, newspapers documented a surge of federal raids across the state targeting businesses with unauthorized immigrant employees, striking fear into families and demonstrating a lack of political voices speaking against such actions. In Hamilton County, attorneys noted that the federal government had increased prosecutions of migrants for re-entry after a prior order of removal, resulting in a greater number of inmates held solely on immigration charges, at 10% over the previous year (Gonzalez 2006). In 2007, state legislators introduced 45 anti-immigrant bills, which Latino leaders decried as "psychological warfare" (Alapo 6/24/2007). By the end of session, five immigration bills remained active: threatening employers who 'knowingly' hired unauthorized immigrants with the loss of their business licenses; criminalizing the transportation of unauthorized immigrants; disallowing the "driving certificate" program; designating the Tennessee Highway Patrol as immigration law enforcers; and prohibiting the use of the taxpayer identification number as a form of identification (Humphrey 6/24/2007).

Federal authorities have been emboldened by the state legal environment. ICE created a "fugitive operations team in Memphis," seeking "absconders" who failed to obey court orders to depart the country. By 2007, arrest numbers in five southern states doubled those of the previous year (Connolly 9//24/2007). Such actions had chilling effects on crime reporting, as immigrant women with children proved reluctant to report or seek aid for domestic abuse because they feared their children would be taken away. Fear of deportation and language barriers also limited reporting, according to nonprofits that had recently begun to reach out to the growing population of Latinos across the state (Trevizo 2008). By 2010, immigration courts in Tennessee reported they could not keep up with their caseloads (Tennessean 2/24, 2010). The anti-immigrant climate was further confirmed in 2010 when the state legislature entertained legislation making it a felony to violate certain identification laws when voting,

even though previously such a violation would only have elicited a charge of perjury (West 5/10/2010).

Like elsewhere, anti-immigrant sentiment and actions contributed to political careers, becoming an issue in the Tennessee senatorial race, with eventual victor Bob Corker challenging his rivals' anti-immigrant pedigrees. Local legislator Zach Wamp also vocally supported 287(g), a form of police-ICE collaboration that deputizes local law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to enforce certain aspects of federal immigration law. This anti-immigrant stance was reinforced by the actions of local Rep. John Duncan, who in 2010 sought legislation to deny citizenship to the US-born children of unauthorized immigrants (Collins 8/7/2010).

The same politicization was true over time in local government. In 2009, Knox County Sheriff Jimmy Jones actively pursued 287(g) for his department. The Knox County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) is elevated by the fact that the Sheriff has sole control over jail policy and budgetary allocations; in fact, the county government is statutorily prohibited from decreasing funding for the KCSO. In 2013, when the KCSO application for 287(g) was denied after more than fourteen months of sustained community opposition by AKIN and other groups, Sheriff Jones was unequivocal in his condemnation of the federal government, which in his view:

“shirk(s) its responsibilities for providing safety and security to its citizens by denying Knox County the 287(g) corrections model . . . Hopefully, the denial of this program will not create an influx of illegal immigrants who think that without this program they will be able to break the law and then be less likely to be deported. . . . I strongly support the 287(g) program and will continue to make every effort to pursue its implementation. I will continue to enforce these federal immigration violations with or without the help of U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). If need be, I will stack these violators like cordwood in the Knox County Jail until the appropriate federal agency responds.”<sup>9</sup>

The callousness and graphic nature of Jones' comment was deeply disturbing to community members of Knox County, as the image of bodies stacked “like cordwood” evoked brutal

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<sup>9</sup> The cordwood terminology is a reference to previous rhetoric describing racist jailings of civil rights demonstrators.

histories of dehumanization and mass atrocities (Terkel and Foley 2013). The Sheriff's statement received national media attention, including from Lawrence Downes (2013) of the *New York Times* who noted, "That's brutal imagery, befitting a violent demagogue, not a sworn peace officer." The Sheriff's comments were covered extensively by all major media outlets in Knoxville and across the state of Tennessee.

Residents of Knox County were also concerned by Sheriff Jones' apparent intention to violate constitutional protections of due process. Since the Knox County jail, which is operated by KCSO and supervised by Sheriff Jones, has not been granted authority to enforce federal immigration orders, instituting indefinite detention of individuals based solely on their immigration status, as his statement suggested he was ready to do, would be a flagrant violation of the law. Based on the Sheriff's statement, and statements of confidential informants collected by AKIN, we suspect that KCSO has not been complying with the law regarding warrantless arrest authority and detainer guidelines.

Other jurisdictions in Tennessee provide contrast to Knox County, such as Davidson County, where Sheriff Daron Hall, whose department received 287(g) delegation of immigration authority in 2007, chose not to apply for re-certification in 2012. Nevertheless, in five years of operation under 287(g), the Davidson County Sheriff's Office (DCSO) deported more than 10,000 immigrants, with even the DCSO acknowledging that the vast majority of those processed under 287(g) had only misdemeanor arrests (DCSO 2009, 2012; Kee 2012). A number of organizations, including the Tennessee American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and TIRRC, have accused the DCSO of a variety of civil rights violations (Kee 2012). One horrific case was that of Juana Villegas, who at nine-months' pregnant was arrested by Davidson County police in front of her children, then taken to jail and held in shackles throughout her labor up to the point of delivery. Post-birth, her newborn was removed from her, and her husband and family were not immediately able to locate the child. Villegas was also denied adequate medical care and developed a breast infection due to her inability to nurse her newborn and the jail's refusal to permit her access to a breast pump or medications to dry her milk supply. In 2011, a federal judge in Tennessee ruled that Davidson County officers had demonstrated "deliberate

indifference” to Villegas’ suffering and medical needs; Davidson County later settled a civil lawsuit over Villegas’ treatment to the tune of nearly half a million dollars (Preston 2013).

Actions within the criminal justice system are often both internally contradictory and contradict the actions of other institutions. In urban areas, this is due in large part to the fact that the four largest cities in Tennessee are governed by Democratic and liberal administrations, while surrounding county governments are Republican and conservative. At the state level, an abundance of anti-immigrant legislation early set a tone that some local administrations tried to counter.

Local LEAs in Tennessee continue to pursue a variety of conflicting strategies around immigration enforcement. For example, the Tennessee Highway Patrol continues to operate under 287(g), and police in Cleveland, TN have actively worked with federal government efforts to enforce immigration laws. But in Chattanooga, police created a “Spanish-language Citizens Academy in which Hispanic immigrant residents receive instruction on how to report crimes” (Gonzalez 3/8/07). More recently, in an address to a large community audience, Chattanooga police Chief Fred Fletcher said his department will not seek to deport immigrants who entered the nation without authorization (Jett 2017).

In Knoxville, City Mayor Madeline Rogero and Knoxville Police Department (KPD) Chief Rausch have publicly welcomed immigrants, even going as far as to state “we are not required by law to be ICE agents and we will not voluntarily be ICE agents” (Witt 2017). These statements come as part of a nationwide push by the US Conference of Mayors to stand in solidarity with immigrants and in support of immigration reform. Meanwhile, in Knox County, the Sheriff’s Office is again pursuing 287(g). Thus, the benefits of city Mayor Rogero’s statement are marginal, as Knoxville’s jail is located in Knox County, such that all those arrested by city police ultimately end up under the jurisdiction of KCSO. Not coincidentally, Sheriff Jones has announced his entry into the county mayoral race.

### **In the Streets and Elsewhere**

Despite legislative trends toward criminalization, there has been notable resistance to anti-immigrant policies across the state, and the social movement activity supporting

immigrants and their families in Tennessee has ranged from the streets to the legislature, from churches, to businesses, to local government. For example, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has criticized the vagueness and unfriendliness to business of some of Tennessee's anti-immigrant laws (Alapo 6/24/2007), and the Nashville Music Association union, Tyson Foods, and the National Pork Producers Council, with a local office in Rutherford County, have all lobbied for immigration reform to raise the cap on worker visas (Tennessean 7/30/2010). More recently, Mid-South Immigration Advocates, a nonprofit existing since 2014, helps people out of detention centers and into status as lawful permanent residents (Zamudio 3/11/2016). The responses have also differed by the institutional home from which the attack was launched. We have already written about some of the responses to the educational system. Here we give a brief glimpse of other actions, concentrating largely in Knoxville, TN, where we have organized and participated.

Tennessee was a notable locale of resistance during the 2006 immigrant protests in response to the Sensenbrenner legislation, which would make unlawful presence an aggravated felony, as well as making those helping unauthorized immigrants subject to prosecution. TIRRC mobilized large numbers of people in protest across the state, as 10,000 marched through the streets of Nashville and 2,000 marched in Knoxville in early March. These demonstrations were also in anticipation of Specter's 'guest worker' legislation (Alapo, 3/17/2006).

A different form of mobilization occurred at the University of Tennessee from March 31 through April 1, as dozens of academics joined with hundreds of service providers (lawyers, nurses, teachers, librarians, and journalists) in a hybrid conference that addressed not only scholarly questions of new destination immigration, but also gave service providers a variety of skills to address the needs of their new populations (Ansley and Shefner 2009). Days later, many of those same local community members marched alongside immigrants through downtown Knoxville, culminating in a demonstration of 2500 outside the federal building, protesting the federal attacks (Kenner 4/11/2006). The Highlander Research and Education Center, a renowned social movement school and center of activism, played an important role in organizing that protest. Mobilization in Knoxville continued into the spring, with over 600 immigrants and supporters rallied at a TIRRC-organized "Day Without Immigrants." Participants

pointed to the need for comprehensive immigration reform as well as the centrality of immigrants and their families to the labor force (Ferrar 5/2/2006). A similar event was organized in Chattanooga, TN, where seven hundred people—from as far as Northern Georgia to Central Tennessee—rallied as part of the national boycott. Businesses closed, and streets were blocked as part of the public demonstration. Even local poultry plants closed for the day, both in support of their workers and in recognition of the fact that many would skip work as part of the boycott (Gonzalez 5/2/2006).

Knoxville has a variety of organizations dedicated to immigrant issues, but, like many new destinations, these have primarily been focused on promoting cultural acceptance and diversity. For example, Hora Latina (HoLa) organizes the annual Hispanic Heritage Festival during Latino History Month, a public event that draws an exponentially increasing audience every year. Programs like Centro Hispano, Latino Task Force, and Catholic Hispanic Ministries offer activities that promote education and integration for Latino immigrants, including adult education and child development classes, English classes, and seminars on everything from civic participation to financial planning. Other organizations, like Catholic Charities, provide legal screenings and counsel for immigrants who are victims of violence. These organizations are not overtly political, and some are prohibited from overt advocacy by their mission statements, nonprofit status, and/or board of directors.

Other organizations, such as the *Comité Popular de Knoxville* and AKIN, are comprised entirely of volunteers and work more explicitly on defending and securing the rights of immigrants and their families. The *Comité*, a group of unauthorized immigrants, emerged in 2012 out of the responses to the KCSO's application for 287(g). Today, these activists work on educating vulnerable immigrants on how to stay out of the reach of the criminal justice system. AKIN has existed in various forms since the mid-2000s and was originally linked to the Tennessee-wide TIRRC. However, in 2012, AKIN formalized as an autonomous organization due to their desire to harness local capacity to address local needs and direct independent campaigns. In contrast to other organizations that serve immigrants in Knoxville, AKIN is engaged in more explicitly political work. Their greater willingness to act in this way is due to

the fact that they are an unincorporated organization whose membership is largely comprised of US citizens and established lawful permanent residents.

AKIN's current organizing revolves around expanding sanctuary, fighting deportations, and resisting the current push by Sheriff Jones to implement 287(g) under a federal administration that has welcomed renewed interest in immigration enforcement from state and local LEAs. AKIN has birthed and shepherded a number of affiliated organizations, including Kindred Futures (educators), the Welcoming Congregations Network (faith groups), and a health care working group comprised of practitioners who are pushing for affirmative policies within their institutions to protect the privacy of patient records from immigration enforcement. Recently, AKIN submitted a statement documenting the KCSO's history of civil rights violations to the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties in anticipation of a meeting of the ICE 287(g) Program Advisory Board, in an attempt to encourage the federal government to reject Knox County's pending application for 287(g). Additionally, AKIN operates a rapid response network that monitors, documents, and intervenes in immigration enforcement and enforcement-like activity.

The incipient Welcoming Congregations Network in Knoxville is currently establishing a spectrum of sanctuary practices, from coordinating physical sanctuaries within local churches, to providing "accompaniment" to those who must travel across the state to Memphis for immigration court, to providing transportation, food and other assistance to the families left behind by those deported. Traditional Knoxville congregations are working to create sister relations with Latino churches to expand their networks, host community dialogues, and promote cultural understanding.

What differentiates Tennessee from so much of the non-coastal US during the current Trump era is the contradictory playing field. How those contradictions play out in the near future has a great deal to do with how extreme federal immigration policy will become, and what that will mean for states and locales. We can certainly say that pro-immigration rights infrastructure in Tennessee has strengthened since 2005, and there continue to be recent indications of even greater strength. Pro-immigrant rights groups have proven themselves

quite flexible and innovative, yet they have many fewer resources than necessary, a common condition for most social movement efforts.

Despite this growing strength, the situation is dire given Tennessee's state legislature. Even moderate beacons of hope in local city governments are tempered by the realities of being surrounded by red counties in a deeply red state. Although immigrant rights groups continue pushing for pro-immigrant policies at the state and local levels, such as tuition equality and safe space resolutions, much of their attention has turned toward preparing for the worst in terms of tangible policy implementation, such as mass detentions and deportations.

In some ways, local activists feel abandoned by the larger immigrant rights movement. The progress possible in New York and California relies on progressive state legislatures and even larger populations of active immigrants and supporters. Thus, despite the growing populations of immigrants and their children in new destination areas, the divergent political infrastructure may differentiate the outcomes of their struggle. Like other issues in the new Trump election world, there continues to be little understanding and less resources for the fights in the non-coastal US.

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