

Open Letter by 40 Ottawa Academics on a Sanctuary City Policy

Ottawa, May 2, 2017

Dear Mayor Watson and City Councillors,

We are 40 Ottawa professors with years of experience working on issues related to immigration, refugees, social inclusion, border control, citizenship, urban studies and access to municipal services. We are lawyers, geographers, sociologists, criminologists, anthropologists, historians, ethicists and social workers holding positions at the University of Ottawa and Carleton University.

We are writing in full support of a Sanctuary City policy in Ottawa. We have been informed that, following the Mayor's opposition, a majority of Council is now unwilling to support such a policy. We urge you to reassess your position and adopt a policy that would contain clear guidelines, implementation timelines, and report-back mechanisms. Some of us shared our expertise with you during deputations at the Community and Protective Services Committee on March 30th. Those of us present were shocked to see how easily the evidence and experiences presented were dismissed by some councillors. We are writing to reassert that, based on our knowledge of the research in this field, we believe it is a necessary policy.

As researchers working in these fields, we know that the Canadian immigration system is increasingly relying on temporary immigration permits that put people in precarious positions (Alboim 2009; Nakache & Kinoshita 2010; Valiani 2013; Golding & Landolt 2013). People without status or with precarious immigration status generally entered Canada with a temporary visa as workers, students, asylum seekers or tourists. They are often in and out of status or at risk of losing it, and this has an impact on their well-being (Rousseau et al. 2008; Magalhaes et al. 2010; Kissoon 2013; Saad 2013; Pashang & Gruner 2015).

We know that immigrants with precarious immigration status face many barriers to accessing services and are confronted with various forms of control in cities (Berinstein et al. 2006; Bhuyan 2012; Villegas 2013; Casas-Cortes 2015; Moffette & Gardner 2015; Hudson et al. 2017). This means that many immigrants are unable to access the services they are entitled to, due to the fear of being detained or deported (Berinstein et al. 2006; Pashang 2011; Saad 2013). Many of them are our neighbours, friends, students, and colleagues, and we believe it important that the City of Ottawa pledge to ensure that they have full access to city and city-funded services, regardless of immigration status.

We also know that cities can do their part to confront this exclusion. Research shows that an important part of integration takes place at the local level (Froy 2010; Caponino & Borkert 2010) and that promoting inclusive urban citizenship has an impact on people's well-being (De Graauw 2012). It is because of their commitment to limiting the devastating effect of harsh immigration policies and to building healthier, safer, and more welcoming cities that 4 cities in Canada and more than 150 cities and counties in the United States have adopted various forms of "Sanctuary City" policies, sometimes known as "Access Without Fear" or "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policies.

Based on the experiences in other cities (Berinstein et al. 2006; Ridgley 2008; Moffette & Gardner 2015; Hudson et al. 2017), we believe a well-designed and well-implemented policy should include:

- A public commitment to never ask about someone's immigration status;
- A public commitment to never share someone's status without their consent;
- The inclusion of all city services and services offered by city-funded agencies;
- The inclusion of the police, through a policy of the Police Services Board;
- The training of staff;
- An education and outreach plan;
- A clear timeline for implementation;
- Report-back mechanisms to follow the progress made.

We believe that implementing a robust policy that ensures access without fear is an important step Ottawa can take towards building a more inclusive city. If you are committed to building such a city, we urge you to adopt and implement a sanctuary city policy immediately.

Signatories

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