



# NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. CHRISTOPHER deFOREST  
Bishop

**Mayor Matthew Tuerk**  
Allentown City Hall  
435 Hamilton Ave.  
Allentown PA 18101

**January 29, 2025**

**Dear Mayor Tuerk and Honorable Members of the City Council,**

I am writing to you as the elected Bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), to express my strong support for the passage of a **Welcoming City Policy** for the city of Allentown. This policy would significantly benefit all residents of our community and those who work here (like myself), fostering a more inclusive, safe, and prosperous environment for everyone. I believe that such a policy aligns with the values of fairness, dignity, and respect that this city stands for, and would provide long-lasting positive impacts on both the social fabric and the economic future of our city.

I represent the regional body of our denomination that includes 237 congregations, many of which are situated in the Lehigh Valley and in the city of Allentown. Our denomination has a long history of being an immigrant church and of welcoming those who are new to our land and those who suffer because of religious, social and political persecution. The foundation of our beliefs and values come from the Bible, which is consistently clear that we are to love our neighbors, welcome the strangers and provide comfort and care to those who are poor, injured, widowed and orphaned.

*We remember God's command in the Old Testament: "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the native-born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." [Leviticus 19:34] We recall the words of Jesus, as he tells through the parable: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." [Matthew 25:35] We hear St. Paul in his letter to the Romans: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God." [Romans 15:7] And these scriptural groundings tie us to our historical roots, since Martin Luther launched our Lutheran movement over 500 years ago, including this call: "How do we know that God dwells in us? If we take upon ourselves the need of the neighbor."*

Over the last four decades our church, the ELCA, has deliberated and created together consistent and clear messages and statements affirming our posture of welcome. If you wish to read more, I gladly refer you to our [Social Message on Immigration](#), written and ratified by our Churchwide Assembly meeting in 1997.

What follows is my understanding – after prayer and after conducting my own research – of the benefits for all, especially the residents and businesses of the City of Allentown, should this Welcoming City Policy be enacted. I am grateful for our partners in Harrisburg, the Lutheran



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Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, for the assistance researching the data and increasing my understanding.

### **Promoting Inclusivity and Unity**

A Welcoming City Policy would send a clear and powerful message that our city is committed to welcoming all people, regardless of their immigration status. In an increasingly diverse world, it is essential that our city fosters an environment where all residents feel safe, supported, and valued. Immigrant communities, in particular, benefit greatly from policies that ensure they are treated fairly and given access to the same opportunities available to all residents. By passing this policy, the city would be actively encouraging a sense of belonging and unity among all its residents, which in turn promotes stronger social cohesion and community well-being.

### **Economic Growth and Opportunity**

One of the most significant benefits of a Welcoming City Policy is the positive impact it can have on local economic growth.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants contribute to the economy in numerous ways—whether through entrepreneurial ventures, skilled labor, or as consumers.<sup>2</sup> Numerous studies have shown that cities with inclusive policies attract more businesses and investment, which helps create jobs, boost economic activity, and increase tax revenues. By supporting immigrant populations and making them feel secure, the city will see tangible economic benefits, from more vibrant local businesses to higher levels of investment.

### **Attracting and Retaining Talent**

In addition to the economic and safety benefits, a Welcoming City Policy positions Allentown as an attractive destination for talent from around the world. Immigrants often bring unique skills, innovative ideas, and entrepreneurial energy to a city.<sup>3</sup> By passing this policy, the city would make itself more appealing to individuals and families seeking a safe, supportive environment in which to live, work, and thrive. This influx of talent can drive further growth, contribute to cultural richness, and strengthen the city's position in a globalized economy.<sup>4</sup>

### **Enhancing Public Safety**

A Welcoming City Policy also strengthens public safety by building trust between law enforcement and immigrant communities. When residents feel that their immigration status may put them at risk of discrimination or deportation, they are less likely to cooperate with police,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/pennsylvania/#>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/02/14/migrants-states-labor-work-permit/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/22/1063104262/immigrant-workers-us-economy-key-jobs>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/29/business/economy/immigrants-labor.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare>



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report crimes, or seek help when needed. By ensuring that everyone in the community, regardless of their background, is treated with dignity and respect, the city would foster better communication and cooperation between law enforcement and the public, ultimately making our community safer for all.

The American Immigration Council explains, “A 2017 report found a correlation with lower crime rates and higher economic indicators in counties that do not honor ICE detainers when compared to counties that do.”<sup>5</sup> The analysis revealed that in welcoming policy counties;

- **Crime is lower.** There are, on average, 35.5 fewer crimes committed per 10,000 people in the welcoming policy counties compared to counties that are not.<sup>6</sup> Crime is defined in the report as the total number of violent crimes (murders, rapes, robberies, and assaults) and property crimes (burglaries, larceny, motor vehicle thefts, and arsons) per 10,000 people. Likewise, a 2016 study found no association between crime rates and policing practices.<sup>7</sup> Multiple studies published since 2017 have confirmed these findings or determined that welcoming city policies have no measurable effect on crime rates.<sup>8</sup> One study in 2020 even found that sanctuary policies reduce domestic violence against Hispanic women.<sup>9</sup> No studies have demonstrated a link between sanctuary policies and increased crime.
- **Median household income is higher.** On average, median household income is \$4,353 higher in the welcoming policy counties than in counties that do not have the policy. This outcome is not driven by income gains among Latinos at the expense of white residents or African Americans. In fact, among white residents, median household income is \$2,836 higher in the welcoming policy counties.<sup>10</sup>
- **Poverty is lower.** The poverty rate is 2.3 percent lower in welcoming policy counties. The rate of poverty among white residents is 1.4 percent lower in welcoming policy counties.<sup>11</sup>
- **Reliance on public assistance is lower.** The percentage of households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as food stamps) is 2.6 percent lower in welcoming policy counties. The percentage of households that receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is 0.9 percent lower. The share of children under 18 who receive public assistance is 4.9 percent lower in welcoming policy counties.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2017/01/26/297366/the-effects-of-sanctuary-policies-on-crime-and-the-economy/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Doris Marie Provine, Monica W. Varsanyi, Paul G. Lewis, and Scott H. Decker, *Policing Immigrants: Local Law Enforcement on the Front Lines* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 76.

<sup>8</sup> <https://sociology.unc.edu/files/2018/01/2017SocComp-ProvidingSanctuary-or-Fostering-Crime-A-Review-of-the-Research-on-Sanctuary-Cities-and-Crime.pdf>; <https://www.cato.org/blog/sanctuary-jurisdictions-florida-do-not-have-higher-crime-rates>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thecgo.org/research/can-sanctuary-policies-reduce-domestic-violence>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-effects-of-sanctuary-policies-on-crime-and-the-economy/>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



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- **Labor-force participation is higher.** On average, the labor-force participation rate (the proportion of the population 16 years and older that is working or actively looking for a job) is 2.5 percent higher in welcoming policy counties. White labor-force participation is also 2.5 percent higher in welcoming policy counties.<sup>13</sup>
- **Employment-to-population ratio is higher.** The employment-to-population ratio is the number of people 16 years and older who are employed, divided by the total number of people 16 years and older. The employment-to-population ratio is 3.1 percent higher in welcoming policy counties. The white employment-to population ratio is 3.2 percent higher in welcoming policy counties.<sup>14</sup>
- **Unemployment is lower.** The unemployment rate is 1.1 percent lower in welcoming policy counties. The white unemployment rate is 0.8 percent lower.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, a 2016 study found no association between unemployment rates and policing practices.<sup>16</sup>

### Welcoming City Policies are Consistent with Federal Law

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center explains, “nothing in federal law requires localities to enforce the Immigration and Nationality Act and regulations. To the contrary, immigration regulation and enforcement are federal functions.<sup>17</sup> The Tenth Amendment precludes federal government from coercing state or local governments to use their resources to enforce a federal regulatory program, like immigration.<sup>18</sup> Policies that limit or prohibit compliance with immigration detainers and requests for notice of release dates do not violate 8 USC § 1373. Immigration detainers are explicitly not mandatory. Electing not to respond to them is entirely within the discretion of local law enforcement.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, multiple federal courts have found detention by local agencies based on ICE detainers to be unconstitutional.<sup>20</sup> The federal government cannot commandeer state and local resources, nor can it require actions in violation of the Constitution.”

### Upholding Human Rights and Dignity

Finally, adopting a Welcoming City Policy reflects our city's commitment to upholding human rights and ensuring that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Immigrants, like all residents, deserve to live without fear of discrimination or exclusion. This policy is an important

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Doris Provine, et al., Policing Immigrants, 76.

<sup>17</sup> *Arizona v. United States*, 132 S.Ct. 2492 (2012)

<sup>18</sup> *Printz v. United States*, 521 U.S. 898, 923-24 (1997).

<sup>19</sup> *Galarza v. Szalczuk*, 745 F.3d 634, 645 (3d Cir. 2014)

<sup>20</sup> *Miranda-Olivares v. Clackamas County*, No. 3:12-cv-02317-ST, 2014 WL 1414305 (D.Or. April 11, 2014); *Jimenez-Moreno v. Napolitano*, No. 1:11-cv-05452, Docket Entry 230 at 16-17 (N.D. Ill. Sept. 30, 2016); *Morales v. Chadbourne*, 996 F. Supp. 2d 19 (D.R.I. 2014) *aff'd in part, dismissed in part*, 793 F.3d 208, 215-216 (1st Cir. 2015); *Mercado et al. v. Dallas County*, No. 3:15-CV-3481 (N.D.Tex filed Jan. 17, 2017); *Orellana v. Nobles County*, No. 0:15-cv-03852 (D. Minn. Jan. 6, 2017).



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step toward ensuring that our community remains just and equitable for all people, regardless of their background or immigration status.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I strongly encourage the mayor and city council to pass a Welcoming City Policy. By doing so, Allentown would not only promote inclusivity and unity but also strengthen its economy, improve public safety, and enhance its global appeal. This policy would demonstrate our city's commitment to the values of fairness, respect, and opportunity, making it a stronger, safer, and more prosperous place for everyone.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to the opportunity to support you in this important initiative.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Christopher deForest  
Bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

2354 Grove Road  
Allentown, PA 18109-3044  
(610) 266-5101 ext 114  
[bishopd@nepsynod.org](mailto:bishopd@nepsynod.org)