



Billy Walsh <bwalsh@natickma.org>

The Natick welcoming policy

1 message

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To: Selectboard@natickma.org

Wed, Nov 27, 2024 at 1:23 PM

Dear Members of the Board,

I have been a resident of Natick for 26 years. It was a small business owner Larkin painting company in Natick for over 20 years. I am writing to urge you to vote to adopt the Welcoming Immigration Policy discussed at the Board's meeting on November 20. The policy is thoroughly vetted, compliant with the law, and provides peace of mind to Natick's residents and visitors of all immigration statuses.

I believe strongly that such a policy is needed at this time due to the pervasive and intentional use of misinformation tactics and the shameful scapegoating that is rooted in fear not reality. As a business owner I have had a front row seat observing how immigrant employees and their families intersect the IRS, immigration, as well as our civic culture in MetroWest Boston. Many immigrants are documented. Some are not. Those who are not the IRS specifically issues tax ID numbers for them to pay taxes. The IRS collects an enormous amount of money in payroll taxes and in filling Social Security coffers. These people who pay taxes never receive a penny in benefits. This is not disinformation, this is fact. The IRS will not talk to immigration and immigration will not talk to the IRS. A broken system works for them and it is hypocritical to scapegoat the immigrant community.

Never has a US citizen not been able to be employed in the Larkin painting company because an immigrant took their job. It has been my experience that most US-born citizens are not interested in a paint contracting career, despite multiple outreach efforts. This labor pool is small and those who are in it do not want to put in the time and energy and training needed to be successful. My experience with immigrant candidates for employment was significantly different. Many established careers, putting the effort and time, and became loyal partners. I think it is safe to say there would be no paint contracting industry in this area without immigrant labor, subcontractors and in many cases owners.

I've also witnessed the suffering and underside of a broken system. The anxiety in a family where the father's and children are legal and the mother is not, is ongoing and debilitating. Driving around without a license, what a stress! Just think of the times you've been pulled over for a speeding ticket, then multiply that a few times over. I witnessed a family being broken up by INS who raided their apartment at five in the morning, ripping the father from the wife and children and sending him back to Brazil after being in detention for a year. All because he missed a court date to process his status. Have you ever experienced the notification getting lost in the mail? Immigrants are always living on the edge feeling stress. A welcome that can reduce stress will benefit our civic culture. It will help reduce crime, accidents, health issues etc. There are so many stories of heartache I can tell you that would fill a book.

Sadly, the statewide Republican Party has decided to use the Board's consideration of this carefully drafted policy as an opportunity to push a national anti-immigrant political agenda, and I know the Board has been flooded with inflammatory form letters and social media posts raising alarmist talking points about the policy. The reality is right there in black and white, so I know that what this policy would do is very clear and

very modest: it would prohibit town employees from asking people about their immigration status or enforcing federal immigration law except where state or federal law requires them to do so. As Members of the Board and the Police Chief pointed out at the meeting, this is simply a codification of existing practice and makes sense from a law enforcement, practical, and moral standpoint.

It is worth reiterating what the policy would NOT do:

- It would NOT prevent anyone, regardless of immigration status, from being arrested, charged, or convicted for any crime.
- It would NOT provide any monetary or other benefits to undocumented people. It would cost nothing.
- It would NOT prevent ICE from enforcing federal immigration law in Natick—it provides no sanctuary.
- It would NOT prevent the police from cooperating with ICE or other federal law enforcement authorities. The policy contains no restrictions on communications with ICE—the only paragraph about communication is paragraph 1, which *requires* the town to share information with ICE under certain circumstances.

The state party's talking points warn of dire consequences that go well beyond the text of the policy, such as an influx of undocumented people using town resources or a sudden spike in crime. Yet, we don't have to speculate because Natick is far from the first municipality in Massachusetts to adopt a similar policy. For example, as a Member of the Board pointed out during the meeting, this policy is modeled on Acton's policy, which was adopted over seven years ago, in October of 2017. Since that time, Acton has not seen a spike in crime or an unexpected surge in population. You could likely find versions of that story in every municipality that has adopted these policies—the scare tactics and anecdotes fall apart in the face of actual world facts.

As much as the statewide Republican Party wants to make this a statewide or even national issue, this has always been about All of Us in Natick and our values. As Select Board Members repeatedly pointed out, this policy results from a multi-year process that has engaged stakeholders from many perspectives and aspects of town government. It's time to finish the job and not let political attacks get in the way of doing what's right.

Please vote to support the policy at your upcoming meeting.

Thank you,

Bill Larkin

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