

Immigrant Allies Statement to City Council – December 8, 2014

In light of the most recent developments in immigration policy, those of us with Immigrant Allies of Marshalltown wanted to visit with the City Council tonight about how we plan to work to help people understand and apply for the new immigration statuses made possible by the executive action announced by President Obama in late November.

Our organization applauds this action, but also recognizes it for what it is: a form of triage. In other words, this action was done to address the emergency that our broken immigration system has created. Just as in a medical emergency, triage is necessary and responsible, but not a substitute for addressing the core issues through the legislative process.

Some people may view this recent development as a political issue...but we view it--and encourage you to view it--as a community issue, while recognizing that our community has been enriched and made stronger by our immigrant friends and neighbors, those with legal statuses and those without.

Historically, Marshalltown has been proactive and embraced demographic changes.: early on, a Diversity Committee was created; a group of City leaders visited Michoacan, Mexico; our local community college created the Education and Training Center to meet the unique needs of newcomers, and local banks--under the leadership of people like our current mayor--found ways early on to serve community members, regardless of status. These are just a few examples of the countless ways that we, as a community, made a choice to be a welcoming place to live.

Fast forward to today, and this tradition continues in many ways. Our police department provides deliberate outreach in the immigrant communities, 100 Women Who Care recently decided to support an effort to bring more services to our Southeast Asian refugees, our police chief has been a Iowa leader in the common-sense public safety policy of offering driver's licenses for those who get driver's training and insurance, and our housing department advocates for all community members to have safe, lead-free homes. So many organizations from our schools, City departments, medical and social service communities have been constantly committed to learning more about how to create the best opportunities for all people living in our community.

Now this new immigration policy will provide an option for legal status to some qualified members of our community, where there had been no option before. Like DACA (deferred action for childhood arrivals) did for undocumented minors two years ago, the new expanding qualifications of DACA and the creation of DAPA (for parents of citizen children) will affect an enormous number of people in our community, either directly or indirectly by changing the life of a loved one.

We will be working to help people get valid information, provide practical help with paperwork, and coordinate legal help. We will also be working with community partners in the school system, at the public library, and the Education and Training Center, to name a few.

We encourage you, as the highest governing body in our community, to be informed about this issue which will affect residents of our community. We know that there may be people who want to make this a controversial or political issue, but we ask the Council and our City leaders to reflect on the legacy of leadership we've mentioned and to show the moral courage to stand up for the respectful treatment of all the valued members of our community, regardless of documentation.

As you can see by all those who came to join us tonight, this is not a Latino issue. This is not an immigrant issue. This is a MARSHALLTOWN issue.

We ask you to join us in our belief that as far as a healthy community is concerned, citizenship as a character trait and a value in action is far more important than a piece of paper or birthright. This is not about agreement or disagreement with the way these changes occurred, but a choice to move forward with what is available to create the best opportunities for our community's people, and therefore our community.