



Office of the Mayor

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Statement of Madison Mayor Paul Soglin Regarding Immigration Issues in Madison

It is estimated that there are close to 200 sanctuary cities. Why the definition varies, sanctuary cities are usually recognized as those communities that, to one degree or another, will not perform detention activities for the federal government, particularly for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Madison, which adopted its resolution on sanctuary, is one of a hundred cities that is part of Cities for Action, a national network committed to immigration reform.

Over the years, I have been involved with many political movements and strategic endeavors to bring about significant reform in areas like civil rights, peace, and economic justice. All of these movements have used a variety of actions to win public support. The tactics included, letter writing campaigns, door-to-door soliciting, organizing campaigns, peaceful protests/marches, disruptive protests, and in some instances, civil disobedience, realizing that the consequence could be arrest.

In each instance, the action selected had to be evaluated as to its effectiveness and consequences. If the movement was in its infancy, we look at how the action creates publicity and serves the function of education. We look at the effectiveness of the tactic and the pressure it places on officials who can bring about the desired change.

In each instance, we need to weigh the benefits of the tactic along with the negative consequences.

Right now, there is great public sympathy, especially in light of the intent of President Trump to punish sanctuary cities by depriving them of their federal funding. The sympathy and support is among the American people and in the Congress. If Trump should take action against any or all of these cities there will be a unified response – politically and legally. Cities in California and New York, where there are favorable federal courts, will most likely be able to get injunctions that will protect all of us.

I remain confident in our present position relative to the federal government. While there is risk of losing federal funds - funds that support our transit systems, our public housing, support for the most vulnerable – we have resources to combat these threats and minimize the risk.

There is a proposal now circulating among city council members to reaffirm and update our sanctuary city status and align it with present city administrative policies and procedures. I support that effort. However, I am deeply troubled and concerned by the introduction of one element, which is to declare the city council offices a “safe space.”

I see little value and a great deal of risk in such an action. First, the practicality of the city council offices

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becoming a sanctuary is minimal. Secondly, the location is less than ideal. Lastly, the facilities are impractical.

The consequences of declaring the offices a “safe space” can be disastrous. In the last session of the legislature, consideration was given to suspending state funding to sanctuary cities. Let us understand that we are far more vulnerable from a state government, which has far more power to remove our funding than the federal government. Let us understand that we do not have the supportive network of other cities if action is taken against us. Let us understand that we will not have a sympathetic judiciary.

We have made the point that we are a sanctuary city. We are committed to justice. The law is on our side. Let us avoid a futile gesture that may make us feel good, but that does not add to the sanctity of our position and only creates enormous risk.

As my friend, former director of Americorps-VISTA and the Peace Corps, Sam Brown often said, “Never offend with style when you can offend with substance.”