

Chia-Chia Wang, Civic Participation Coordinator
American Friends Service Committee Immigrant Rights Program

Distinguished City Councilmembers and interested community members,

I am a staff member with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Immigrant Rights Program based in Newark NJ. Our program provides legal services to low or no-income immigrants, and organizes immigrants who have been affected by immigration policies on the local, state and federal level. While the larger AFSC is a 97-year old organization, our program has been in existence for roughly twenty years in New Jersey and serves immigrants from all over the world who have settled in New Jersey.

In the summer of 2013, the Newark Police Department adopted a new policy that mandates department personnel to decline all immigration detainer requests from the federal immigration agency. We are proud to be part of a municipality that will not hold immigrants for deportation purposes and makes NO exceptions to the policy. The Newark Police Department recognizes that it has authority over criminal issues, along with the local prosecutors, and that bringing in immigration agencies only damages any trust relationships with the city's large immigrant community. They have been clear with us that they realize that their job in law enforcement is to protect the public safety, not to identify or deport immigrants. In Newark, about 25% of our residents are foreign born.

Immigration detainers may be placed on people who have some contact with local police, or who are being released from criminal sentences, either completely or on parole or probation. They have already served criminal sentences and been deemed eligible for release by the criminal system. Any further detention and deportation is additionally punitive, hurts individuals and their families, and benefits no one except the private companies and public entities that are paid to detain immigrants. The impacts of detention and deportation are immense and can last a lifetime. We urge Philadelphia to follow the example of other cities and establish policies that minimize immigration and police collaborations and help keep families safe and complete.