FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 15, 2020
Media Contact: Vera Parra | 917-519-7656 | veraeparra@gmail.com

DC Council Passes a Strengthened, Expanded, and Permanent Sanctuary Values Act to Safeguard Immigrant Communities

Just one year after the passage of emergency legislation of the same name, the DC Council voted earlier today to pass a permanent version of the Sanctuary Values Act, which doubles down on DC’s status as a Sanctuary City by prohibiting DC agencies from cooperating with ICE.

For decades DC government voluntarily helped ICE detain immigrants through the DC Jail, MPD, and other DC agencies by sharing information with ICE and giving ICE agents special access inside DC facilities. These abuses contributed to the over-policing, mass incarceration, and deportation of Black, Brown, and indigenous communities in the District, which were further exposed during the protests and uprisings this summer.

“I am so elated that the DC Council is committed to the safety of myself and all other DC residents who are immigrants! The Sanctuary Values Act will end collaboration with an agency created by the federal government to terrorize, surveil, brutalize, and carry out state-sanctioned violence in collaboration with the police. DC is saying no more, and I am so honored to witness it,” said Joella Roberts, founder of Migration Matters and member of United We Dream DMV and UnDocuBlack Network.

The Sanctuary Values Act would not exist without the courage and tireless work of DC’s immigrant communities, especially the Black and Brown organizers who pushed, advocated, and shepherded this bill through every stage of the process. Because of their efforts and robust community support, the permanent Sanctuary Values Act has stronger protections and safeguards more DC residents from ICE than the temporary legislation passed in 2019.

“I feel so proud of myself as a single mother and a street vendor. I am also very proud of my community. I fight for my 13-year-old daughter, Kimberly, who has been here since she was 7 years old. It has been a long, hard road for us and for our community. Thank God, there are people who took each others’ hands to work together for real Sanctuary, and thank God for the community that has supported me. My cancer has returned and I am so glad my daughter will see a future where the police can no longer throw our people to the Migra,” said Arely Andrade, Vendedores Unidos.
“The protests and uprisings this summer have further exposed how DC’s criminal legal system enacts violence against Black, Brown, and indigenous communities. Ending our police and prison’s collaboration with a notoriously abusive DHS police force is a critical, first step to addressing DC’s criminal legal system,” said Julie Mao, an attorney with Just Futures Law.

The permanent legislation includes new prohibitions on the types of information that can be shared with ICE, applies to all DC agencies including the DC Jail and MPD, bans DC facilities from ever serving as immigrant detention centers, adds reporting and accountability requirements, does not exclude anyone from its protections based on prior contact with police. The policy also includes a critical amendment to close a courthouse loophole that ICE and the US Marshals have used to detain individuals at DC Superior Court.

“Today, after many years of pushing for this legislation to go through, we are celebrating victory. DC chose to protect its residents and our immigrant community! We can now feel a little safer knowing we shouldn’t have to worry about deportation and separation from our families. But it’s imperative to know that this fight is not the end; we still have to end any loopholes that allow ICE to terrorize our neighbors, friends, and family here in DC,” said Gerson Quinteros, Organizer of United We Dream

“While only the abolition of ICE will keep our immigrant neighbors safe from deportation, this bill is a major step forward in creating a safer and more just DC. We look forward to building off of this moment as we continue to combat ICE here in DC and work to abolish every institution that polices and imprisons Black and Brown communities,” said Jen Amuzie, Organizer with Sanctuary DMV

For these protections to matter, District agencies must fully adhere to the Sanctuary Values Act and the Councilmembers must closely monitor DC’s compliance with the law because ICE will try to find new ways to detain members of our community regardless of local laws or who is in the White House. Even as we acknowledge that the struggle for justice and liberation is far from over, we celebrate this victory with immigrant communities and organizers in DC, especially those who bravely shared their stories and fought for justice. They are the reason DC now has a permanent Sanctuary Values Act and their work will continue to build a city that genuinely keeps its people safe.

###

ICE Out of DC Coalition is an abolitionist, anti-racist, locally-led coalition of immigrant organizations, community groups, faith congregations, and service providers fighting for a DC that does not incarcerate, surveil, or deport but instead invests in the growth, health, and healing of its people. Organizational members include Calvary Episcopal Church, CARECEN, Congregation Action Network, DC Jobs With Justice, DIWA, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Just Futures Law, Many Languages One Voice, Pan African Community Action, Sanctuary DMV, Trabajadores Unidos DC, and United We Dream DMV.