TALKING POINTS ON
Creating More Welcoming Communities

As immigration continues to be a polarizing issue at the national level, localities are increasingly finding ways to promote pro-immigrant policies in order to benefit from immigration and shape the political discourse. The Truman Center is providing these talking points on why creating welcoming communities is good for national security and recommendations on how to do so.¹

For more in-depth resources and tools to talk about immigration and national security, please visit the Truman Center’s issue page on immigration: https://www.trumancenter.org/issues/immigration-and-national-security.

TALKING POINTS ON CREATING WELCOMING COMMUNITIES

A humane immigration policy is one that upholds fundamental values of dignity of all persons and promotes a welcoming approach by the host community. This belief is not at odds with national security. In fact, generous immigration policies and efforts to welcome and integrate immigrants in local communities can strengthen our national security in many ways.

- Immigration policy highlights the nexus between local and foreign policy and how the former can be a driver of the latter when properly leveraged. Welcoming policies can better integrate immigrants into local economic life, increase economic stability, and encourage diasporas to create stronger bonds between the United States and home countries. By promoting such policies at the national level, the federal government can help make the connection between national and sub-national policies and engage all citizens in its efforts.

- Welcoming rhetoric counters radicalization by standing in contrast to the hate-filled rhetoric of terrorist groups and providing support to resettlement efforts by allies. A 2015 letter to Congress signed by over twenty national security experts,

¹ The following recommendations are guided in part by Welcoming America’s core standards for its Certified Welcoming program.
including Henry Kissinger, retired General David Petraeus, Michael Chertoff, Madeleine Albright, and Leon Panetta, noted that “resettlement initiatives help advance US national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees.”

• To achieve welcoming communities, immigrant affairs should be embedded in local government agencies and factored into local policy making. Health and human service agencies, departments of education, law enforcement agencies, and other public-facing local government services should be set up to receive input from immigrant communities and to enact programs that proactively engage them and address their needs.

• Immigration has local economic, cultural, and civic benefits, which allow for improved economic security and strengthen the United States’ global leverage, increasing its overall security. To maximize this impact, localities should make special efforts to design programs tailored to immigrant communities. This includes efforts to reach out to and draw immigrants into everyday civic and economic life, including offering assistance in filing for US citizenship, as well as services aimed at improving the economic and overall health of immigrant households.

• Examples of pro-immigrant local policies include expanded health and social benefits coverage, programs that fund access to legal counsel, and programs in schools, libraries, and other community centers to teach English and civics and deliver Know Your Rights presentations. Additional policies can encourage local businesses to work with or hire immigrants and broaden language-access rules and ensure they are strictly followed.

• Local community leaders and elected officials can also use their platforms to encourage welcoming rhetoric. This ensures that positive messages about immigration are front and center in local discourse, which gives faith to immigrant communities that they can safely avail themselves of local resources.