**The Immigrant Trust Act: A test of commitment to a safe, healthy NJ**

**By Jon Moscow**

The Immigrant Trust Act bill (ITA, S3672/A4987) in the New Jersey Legislature should not be controversial. As its title implies, it would allow immigrants, regardless of immigration status, to trust that they can access public resources without danger of detention or deportation. It protects people’s ability to obtain healthcare, report wage theft, and send their children to school. If a crime victim were to file a report with the police, they wouldn’t have to worry that they themselves would wind up being detained. Someone in a domestic dispute would know they could call the police without it leading to their partner being deported.

Each of these provisions clearly benefits the community at large, as well as the individual. Public health, education and safety, and enforcement of labor laws are essential to a healthy society. The Act’s provisions limiting police interactions with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) only to those required by law are essential to building or maintaining positive community-police relations. This is especially true when the Federal administration is aggressively targeting immigrants, even those who have well-established immigration standing, such as green cards.

So why has the ITA remained bottled up in committee in the Legislature?

Much of the answer must include the intense vilification of immigrants, undocumented, and, often, documented as well. A nation that prides itself on being a “nation of immigrants,” and a haven for the oppressed, actually makes it very difficult for immigrants to gain refugee status or asylum, not to mention citizenship. Fearmongering fuels the perception that immigrants bring crime, though in fact, they have lower crime rates than citizens.

The need for the ITA has become ever more evident and pressing over the past few months. Far from focusing on those whom it claims to be its target--undocumented violent criminals—ICE and its associated agencies are arresting and deporting people who have well-documented legal status, and in some cases, holding them in conditions that amount to torture. ICE is also targeting people with green cards who exercise their First Amendment rights, such as Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia University student activist.

We don’t know how much the ITA, if passed, can protect the public from these actions. But it is an important step. It will offer some protections by ensuring that the State of New Jersey will limit its collaboration only to what is required by law. It will make a strong statement of the state’s commitment to the well-being of all its communities.

The ITA’s passage will require active education of both the public and the legislators. It is a test of both the state and people of New Jersey’s commitment to a healthy, safe society and a rejection of the politics of fear.