

Testimony of Reverend Gabriel Salguero

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary

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My name is Gabriel Salguero. With my wife, Jeanette, I am the pastor of the Lamb's Church of the Nazarene in New York City and I am the founder of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC) which represents some of the more than 8 million Latino evangelicals in the United States. I offer my sincere thanks to Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Leahy, Ranking Member Feinstein and the other members of the committee; I am honored to be here today.

Let me begin by saying that I am heartbroken to hear about the senseless violence and tragedy these witnesses and their families have experienced. I ask God to bless these families and provide grace and comfort to each family member here today. I imagine that every family member, friend, and community member continues to reel from shock, loss and grief at the remembrance of these lost loved ones. My prayers and most sincere condolences go to you and your families. Nothing we can do here today will heal that grief but the families here today remain in my prayers. I pray for an end to violent acts such as these and I pray that those who would commit such acts face just consequences.

I'm here to speak about my conviction that our nation possesses the wisdom and leadership to provide a way forward on immigration policy that works to prevent these tragedies from occurring in the future while avoiding harming entire communities in the process. We, as a

nation, can and must find real solutions that deter violence while wisely integrating the vast majority of hard working immigrants. For years, faith communities have played a critical role in both comforting victims of violence while simultaneously promoting community trust and providing safe haven to refugees fleeing violence, and other immigrants facing the daunting challenges of seeking opportunity in the United States. I do not believe that the policies needed to address the tragedies discussed here today need to be at odds with policies that seek to promote trust and cooperation with immigrant communities. The values of the sanctuary movement in the United States are deeply rooted in safety, family unity and trust. Those values are not adversarial to the promotion of healthy, vibrant and nonviolent communities. And they are the foundation for hundreds of communities across the country who have chosen to embrace local law enforcement policies that foster and protect trust. These policies are designed to prevent dangerous crimes, not encourage them.

In the midst of our grief, policies should avoid criminalizing or casting collective blame on an entire community for the actions committed by one or a small number of individuals. In order to uphold our criminal justice system and ensure that our communities are protected from crime, we must also ensure that victims and other community members feel safe enough to come forward and interact with law enforcement. Cities across the United States have sought to work circumspectly with federal immigration authorities and on the use of immigration detainers in an effort to ensure that survivors of domestic violence, human trafficking, and other serious crimes will cooperate with law enforcement and come forward. To be clear, as a pastor I know first-hand that no one in the immigrant community wants an increase in violent crime. Still we know, that if we fail to create policies that promote trust, victims and witnesses will remain silent due to

their fear that they or the loved ones could face deportation for having sought protection from the police. This silence creates fear and exposes all of our community members to greater risks.

The original Sanctuary Movement of the early 1980s sought to provide safe haven to many refugees fleeing dangerous civil unrest in their home countries who did not meet the eligibility requirements of our asylum laws and who were often placed in detention centers and risked being sent home despite the serious danger they faced upon their return. It was a collective response from places of worship to offer shelter and safety to those who desperately needed it and a moral concomitant to our faith imperative to love all people. Over the last years as deportations have resulted in families being ripped apart and U.S. citizen children have been placed in foster care because their parents were deported, faith communities, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and my own evangelical tradition, have advocated for common-sense policies that are wise and just.

Policies that limit cooperation between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities do not insulate or shield immigrants from any risk of deportation. Our federal immigration laws still apply in every city and in every state in the nation. What these local policies do is help local and state police do their job, which is to keep their communities safe and to enforce the laws of their municipalities and states—not immigration law. They are a reaction to collaboration with immigration authorities that tore families apart and punished victims and witnesses of crimes with the threat of deportation simply for seeking help from the police. The members of this committee alone represent states in which over over a hundred counties and cities have adopted these types of policies that promote community trust.

There is a crisis in this country – our rates of incarceration have grown at exponential rates over the last three decades. Many individuals in our prisons struggle with serious mental illnesses, limited opportunities and little or no community support system. They often languish for years or decades in our prison system without any meaningful rehabilitative or reentry support, and are released onto our streets, where guns flow, with no support, no job, and no family. To stop recidivism, we need better mental health services, additional support for those released into society and treatment for addiction. Members of the faith community should also do our share to ensure better care, stronger support, and accountability for those released back into society.

I believe we can and must focus on solutions that will foster integration and safety—they are not mutually exclusive. I believe that legislation targeting immigrant communities may lead to increased crime as it will silence many of the more than 11 million immigrants who will fear cooperation with local law enforcement. I pray that we, as a nation, resist politicizing these tragedies with sweeping and unproductive measures and instead work with local communities to ensure real solutions for community safety. I continue to pray for *Solomonic* wisdom that focuses on deterring violent criminal activity while fostering partnerships with local communities and law enforcement.

Creating policies that further target immigrants will not advance public safety – and will instead serve to further marginalize and isolate immigrant communities. Good policies are made by working together towards justice and safety for all people. The actions of one person should never be used to justify policies that criminalize entire communities. Deportation-centric

policies that criminalize immigrants have been completely unsuccessful in lowering crime rates – with studies showing there is no empirical evidence that cracking down on deportations reduces crime rates. Instead, those policies have served to tear apart families and communities.

Let's work together to reform our nation's immigration laws in smart ways. The faith community will continue to work to comfort the grieving and advocate real solutions to our broken immigration system. Yes, our immigration system is broken and needs reform. But we should not move forward with reactionary legislation that does not address the real issues at hand. The real solution to our immigration challenges is broad, just, and humane immigration reform which would strengthen community and law enforcement relationships, and place undocumented immigrants on an earned path to citizenship, thereby allowing them to contribute even more to their families, communities, and our country.

Let's work together to promote community safety. We can and should look at state and local policies carefully. I encourage communities to carefully tailor their policies. I encourage the federal government to carefully review its own policies and work with these localities across the country to ensure that our systems appropriately meet the goals of violence prevention against all of our community members by encouraging trust and cooperation. But I do not encourage us to force states and localities to pursue one-size-fits-all policies.

As we continue to mourn and pray, let's work together to find real and workable solutions that promote peace and security, not hostility or fear. I pray for an end to senseless acts of violence. I pray for all the policymakers to make wise and deliberate decisions. I pray for reform that

promotes thoughtful community safety policies, immigrant integration, and common-sense immigration reform. I pray for God to comfort the pain and grief of each of the families here today.

Thank you for inviting me here today. The National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC) looks forward to working with policymakers on both sides of the aisle to achieve commonsense immigration reform.