

**CENTERING BLACK WOMEN, GIRLS, GENDER NONCONFORMING PEOPLE AND
FEM(ME)S
IN CAMPAIGNS FOR EXPANDED SANCTUARY AND FREEDOM CITIES
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent decades, as anti-immigrant rhetoric has intensified and policing, detention, and deportations of immigrants have dramatically increased, social movements have responded with calls for the creation of sanctuary spaces, institutions and cities offering protections to immigrants. In response, a growing number of municipalities have declared themselves “sanctuary cities” by enacting administrative policies and legislation limiting collaboration with federal immigration authorities to varying degrees. In the wake of 2017 federal executive orders and a proposed 2018 federal budget advancing an agenda of mass deportation which relies on criminalization of immigrants as both a mechanism and justification for deportation and exclusion, immigrant rights and racial justice groups have issued renewed – and expanded – calls for sanctuary. Progressive legislators and institutions have responded to this call to action – and to attacks on “Sanctuary Cities” by the federal government - by recommitting to protecting immigrant communities.

Organizations like BYP100, Mijente, and Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) are also going beyond existing frameworks to call for sanctuary for *all* communities experiencing aggressive criminalization, policing, and incarceration, including and especially Black communities, both immigrant and U.S. born, launching national campaigns for “Expanded Sanctuary” and “Freedom Cities.” Building on municipalities’ and institutions’ declared intentions to resist federal efforts to target immigrants by remaining or becoming “sanctuary cities,” these campaigns call on policymakers – and on all of us – to not only resist egregious federal efforts to coerce cities and counties to participate in discriminatory and harsh immigration enforcement efforts, but also to dream bigger and do more. Expanded Sanctuary and Freedom City campaigns call for an end to *all* policing and immigration enforcement practices that target Black and Brown communities, immigrant and U.S. born. They also call on us to envision and build the communities we want, through reinvestment of resources away from surveillance, punishment and exclusion and toward addressing community needs. Focusing on shared experiences of racial profiling, criminalization, and exclusion between immigrant and U.S. born Black and Brown communities offers opportunities to build bridges across divides of race, immigration status, gender, sexuality, and faith in a

time of division and scapegoating. It also facilitates building strong coalitions rooted in mutual aid and shared commitment to protecting all members of our communities

A rallying cry of campaigns for Expanded Sanctuary and Freedom Cities has been “Black people need sanctuary too” – referring not only to Black immigrants, but also affirming that non-immigrant Black communities are entitled to protections from police profiling, discriminatory and abusive policing, as well as collaboration between police and other public institutions such as schools and hospitals that contribute to criminalization and mass incarceration, in the same ways that immigrants are entitled to protection. In this policy brief, we expand and deepen that call to say “Black women, girls, gender nonconforming people and fem(me)s need sanctuary too!” and outline a series of concrete steps policymakers, institutions and communities can take to protect Black women, girls, trans and gender nonconforming people.

Often invisible in conversations about profiling, policing, criminalization, mass incarceration and deportation, Black women, girls, and fem(me)s face unique forms and sites of criminalization, state violence, and intra-community violence. It is essential that as we dream of Expanded Sanctuary and Freedom Cities, we center Black women, girls, and fem(me)s in our vision, advocacy, organizing, and implementation. In order to protect Black women, girls, gender nonconforming people and fem(me)s sanctuary cities, institutions, and spaces must:

- Offer the maximum degree of protection from information sharing and collaboration between police, public and private institutions, and immigration authorities;
- Protect sensitive locations such as churches, hospitals, health care, and birthing facilities, shelters, courtrooms, social service agencies, foster care facilities, schools and other learning institutions and other locations where Black women and girls may be vulnerable from immigration enforcement agents;
- Decriminalize offenses most likely to funnel Black women and girls into the criminal and deportation systems, including drug offenses, “broken windows” and poverty-based offenses, and prostitution-related offenses, and offenses imposing higher penalties on people living with HIV;
- Create and support culturally competent pre-arrest diversion programs;
- Eliminate mandatory arrest policies;
- Remove police and end criminalization of students in schools and other learning environments;
- Protect women, girls, trans and gender nonconforming people from gender-specific police abuses including police sexual violence and violations of the rights of trans and gender nonconforming people;

- Imagine, develop, implement, and assess community-based responses to violence that will ensure safety for Black women, girls, gender nonconforming people and fem(me)s within our families, homes, relationships, communities, and institutions.

Finally, beyond providing sanctuary or building toward freedom by challenging and eliminating immigration enforcement and policing practices that cause harm to Black women, we have a responsibility to create conditions that will ensure safety from intrapersonal and intra-communal violence for Black women, girls, gender nonconforming people and fem(me)s.