

San Francisco Reaches Out to Immigrants

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SAN FRANCISCO — The city of San Francisco has started an advertising push with a very specific target market: illegal immigrants. And while the advertisements will come in a bundle of languages — English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Vietnamese — they all carry the same message: you are safe here.

In what may be the first such campaign of its kind, the city plans to publish multilanguage brochures and fill the airwaves with advertisements relaying assurance that San Francisco will not report them to federal immigration authorities.

Mayor Gavin Newsom said the campaign was simply an amplification of a longstanding position of not cooperating with immigration raids or other enforcement. The city passed a so-called sanctuary ordinance in 1989.

Still, Mr. Newsom said, it never hurts to advertise. “It’s one thing to have a policy on paper,” he said. “It’s another to communicate it directly to people who could be impacted.”

The television and radio campaign will tell immigrants they have “safe access” to public services, including schools, health clinics and — perhaps most importantly — the police, something that local law enforcement officials say is a chronic problem in émigré communities.

“It is a trademark of a criminal predator to convince victims that because of the victims’ immigration status that they — not the predator — will be treated as the criminal,” said Kamala Harris, the city’s district attorney. “We want to remove that tool from the criminal’s tool belt.”

Ms. Harris said particular problems in immigrant communities include human trafficking, fraud and elder abuse, which she said was widely underreported.

San Francisco is not alone in its sanctuary status; New York, Detroit and Washington have policies that discourage the police from enforcing immigration law. Nevertheless, the campaign’s announcement prompted a round of eye-rolling among anti-immigration forces in California and Washington, many of whom are still galled by the city’s 2007 decision to grant identification cards to anyone who could prove residence, regardless of legal status.

“I guess it’s what you expect from San Francisco,” said Ira Mehlman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform in Washington, which lobbies for stronger immigration enforcement. “But now, not only are they helping people break the law of the federal government, they are advertising it. I don’t know of any other city actually looking for illegal immigrants.”

Rick Oltman, national media director for Californians for Population Stabilization in Santa Barbara, said the campaign could actually be a boon for other Bay Area cities if it drew illegal immigrants out of those communities and into San Francisco.

“The only people who are the losers here are the people of San Francisco who are going to hate the way the city looks in two or five years, when the illegal immigrant population grows massively,” said Mr. Oltman, who said such populations had a negative effect on crime, education, health and the environment.

But Mr. Newsom said his advertising campaign was less a hard sell than a hard look at the reality of immigration policy.

“We’re not arguing against common-sense reforms,” he said. “We’re not arguing against reforms at all. But in lieu of that, we’re doing the best we can to say if they see a crime report it, and if they have a child educate them.”