RESOLUTION 16-03

OPPOSING GOVERNOR PENCE'S ACTIONS TO WITHHOLD SUPPORT FROM SYRIAN REFUGEES
AND
WELCOMING SYRIAN REFUGEES TO OUR STATE AND OUR COMMUNITY

WHEREAS, Bloomington is a community that strives to cultivate, nurture, and protect diversity. Difference strengthens our community and enriches our collective quality of life; and

WHEREAS, Bloomington is a community that does not tolerate hate. Instead, it is the codified policy of the City that prejudice, intolerance and discriminatory practices, including discrimination based on race, religion, color, sex, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, housing status, or status as a veteran is "contrary to the principles of freedom and equality of opportunity and is a burden to the objectives of the public policy of the [C]ity;"[1]and

WHEREAS, Bloomington has a long history of responding to hate and intolerance with a strong and unwavering respect for, and commitment to, diversity; and

WHEREAS, Bloomington is a welcoming community. Through City initiatives such as our Human Rights Commission and Safe and Civil City Program, and through the many efforts of our citizens, together, we work to ensure that Bloomington is a safe place that embraces all visitors and residents; and

WHEREAS, the conflict in Syria has caused enormous human suffering; and

WHEREAS, as of mid-February 2016, more than 470,000 Syrian civilians have been killed since the start of conflict in that country in March 2011. More than 13.5 million Syrians need humanitarian assistance; and more than 4.6 million have been forced to leave their country and seek refuge in other countries, making the Syrian catastrophe one of the worst humanitarian crises since World War II. Following peaceful protests calling for democracy and for the respect of human dignity, the Assad regime and ISIS/Daesh exacted wide-spread violence. As a result, Syrians fled this death and destruction[2]; and

WHEREAS, in response, President Obama announced that the United States will increase the number of Syrian refugees admitted to the United States by at least 10,000 in the 2016 fiscal year, noting that the men, women, and children who are approved for resettlement in the United States are fleeing persecution and "want nothing more than a chance for a safer, better future for themselves and their families," no different than other immigrants;[3]and

WHEREAS, As made clear in statements by both the former U.S Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano and former Commissioner for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Doris Meissner, "only refugees who have been identified as the most vulnerable -- particularly, survivors of violence and torture, those with severe medical conditions, and women and children -- are permitted even to begin the U.S screening process."[4] All refugees who are candidates for resettlement in the U.S. must undergo a rigorous and thorough vetting process involving multiple agencies of the federal government. What's more, Syrian refugees are subject to additional security screening -

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[1] *Bloomington Municipal Code* §2.21.020
2 Anne Barnard. "Death Toll From War in Syria Now 470,000, Group Finds." *New York Times*, February 11, 2016.
3 "Obama calls on Americans to welcome Syrian refugees as latter-day Pilgrims." *The Guardian*, November 26, 2016.
[4] *Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc. v Pence and Wernert*, Case No: 1:15-cv-01858-TWP-DKL, Declarations of Doris Meissner at 2 and Janet Napolitano at 1.

WHEREAS, on February 29, 2016, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Indiana found that the Governor's directive constituted discrimination based on national origin in violation of the Equal Protection Clause; as a consequence, the court issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting the State of Indiana from taking any action to interfere with or attempt to deter the settlement of Syrian refugees in Indiana; and

WHEREAS, the District Court held that, "[t]he State's conduct clearly discriminates against Syrian refugees based on their national origin. Although the State says it has a compelling reason for doing so – the safety of Indiana residents—the withholding of federal grant funds from Exodus that it would use to provide social services to Syrian refugees in no way furthers the State's asserted interest in the safety of Indiana residents;"[8] and

WHEREAS, the day after the District Court handed down its order, Governor Pence indicated that he has ordered the State's Attorney General to appeal the decision with vigor, stating that, "during these uncertain times, we must always err on the side of caution." The State filed its *Notice of Appeal* on March 8, 2016; and

WHEREAS, Governor Mike Pence's refusal to extend certain federal benefits to Syrian refugees and the silence of Indiana leaders in the face of the Governor's decision have fostered a climate of unfounded fear, xenophobia, and violence against Syrians, Muslims, and those perceived to be such; and

WHEREAS, the perception of Syrians and Muslims as "dangerous," "violent," and otherwise depraved is a misguided Western construct. Such representations are reckless, obscure our common humanity, and trigger violence against the innocent. Such representations are made even more egregious when communicated by those with great influence over public perception, such as the media, elected officials, and political candidates; and

WHEREAS, Historically, such confused rhetoric and violence are amplified after an act of terrorism. Indeed, since the Paris attacks, Muslims and Islamic centers across the country have been subjected to threats, attacks, and vandalism. In the space of one month, such violence increased three-fold across the nation, with 38 reported incidents between mid-November and mid-December of 2015. These crimes include physical attacks against Muslim children as young as six years old, targeting of Islamic Centers, and threats against Muslim Americans through the use of guns and knives.[11] In Indiana, the Islamic Society of North America in Plainfield was vandalized in February 2016. In Bloomington, one of our own community members was subjected to Islamophobic violence in front of the Sofra Café; and

WHEREAS, Bloomington is a welcoming place and historically, Indiana was once too. As the home of Hoosier Hospitality, Indiana is missing an opportunity to be hospitable, to be compassionate, and to be informed. This is an opportunity to work collectively to overcome misunderstandings about Syrians and Muslims. In Michigan City, the home of the state's oldest mosque, the City Council recently passed a resolution condemning increased attacks on Muslims and upholding respect for the Muslim religion. Likewise, all Indiana leaders should uphold respect for civil liberties and civil rights instead of fanning the flames of fear. We must not trade our humanity for a false notion of security; and

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[8] *Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc. v Pence and Wernert*, Case No: 1:15-cv-01858-TWP-DKL, Order Granting Plaintiff's Mot. for Prelim. Injunct., Mar. 29, 2016 at 34-35.

[11] Eric Lichtblau, "Crimes Against Muslim Americans and Mosques Rise Sharply," *The New York Times,* December 17, 2015.

PRESENTED by me to the Mayor of the City of Bloomington, Monroe County, Indiana, upon this 29th day of March, 2016.

NICOLE BOLDEN, Clerk
City of Bloomington

SIGNED and APPROVED by me upon this 4th day of April, 2016.

JOHN HAMILTON, Mayor
City of Bloomington

SYNOPSIS

This resolution is sponsored unanimously by the Council. The measure opposes Governor Pence's actions to withhold support from Syrian refugees and welcomes Syrian refugees to our State and our community. The resolution documents the widespread suffering of Syrians, the unconstitutional nature of the Governor's actions, the rigorous process through which prospective Syrian refugees are vetted, and the systemic rhetoric that confuses Syrians and Muslims with terrorists. Asserting that such rhetoric is irresponsible, the resolution points out that Bloomington is a welcoming community with a long history of responding to hate with an unwavering commitment to diversity and human rights. The resolution maintains that the City of Bloomington is committed to the alleviation of human suffering and to meaningful dialogue among and between residents. The measure calls upon members of the community to express their opposition to Governor Pence's actions and for the City Clerk to send a copy of the Governor of Indiana, Speaker of the House, President Pro-Tempore of the Senate, and Assembly members representing districts touching the City, the President of Indiana University, and leaders of other municipalities around the State as deemed appropriate.