



## **BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

Commission on Immigrant Affairs  
Recommendation Number: 20160121-004Ba  
Regarding "Welcoming Refugees"

WHEREAS, the City of Austin and Travis County are home to diverse immigrant populations and we welcome them in our city and county; and

WHEREAS, according to the 2010 U.S. Census approximately 18% of residents are foreign-born; and

WHEREAS, immigrants comprise a vital part of our local workforce and approximately one-third (150,006) of the local labor force is made up of individuals who speak a language other than English at home; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin and Travis County are committed to the public safety, health and quality of life of all residents regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, and physical or mental disability; and

WHEREAS, the aforementioned commitment is reflected in the existence of the Commission on Immigrant Affairs to advise the city council on issues of common concern to immigrants, particularly in the areas of health and human services, education, and the demographic makeup of the Austin immigrant community; and

WHEREAS, since the beginning of 2013, the Commission on Immigrant Affairs has been gathering input from local immigrant service providers on their work, their needs and how the City of Austin might better support the provision of services to the immigrant community; and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is a part of Welcoming America, formally declared itself a Welcoming City on September 19, 2013, and engaged all relevant sectors, including government, business, and non-profits, in the Austin Welcoming City Initiative in 2015 to work together to create a welcoming community climate that supports long-term integration; a commitment to institutionalizing strategies that ensure the ongoing inclusion and long-term economic and social integration of newcomers; and engaging newcomers and long-time residents to find common ground and shared leadership in order to craft a community-driven vision for Austin as a Welcoming Community; and

WHEREAS, according to the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees the term "refugee" applies to any person who: "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or,

owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it;" and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin's Public Safety Committee voted in favor of the statement "We are welcoming of all refugees in Austin;" and

WHEREAS, Mayor Adler joined more than 100 U.S. mayors in endorsing the statement by Cities United for Immigration Action: "Our hearts go out to the people of Paris and those impacted by these senseless acts of violence. The American values of freedom and opportunity define who we are as a country, and to extend that promise to Syrian families seeking refuge from the threat of terror is imperative. As municipal leaders, we seek always to protect our communities, while we honor the diversity and growth of our cities and counties. The United States has a robust screening and background check system that ensures our safety and security is protected, as we welcome those in need of refuge onto our shores;" and

WHEREAS, the City of Austin is the largest refugee resettlement site in Central Texas.

THEREFORE, be it:

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin build upon and strengthen existing relationships with local Refugee Resettlement agencies and make sure that refugee voices are represented in government decision making;

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin participate in the White House's Building Welcoming Communities Campaign;

RECOMMENDED, that the City of Austin take the appropriate steps to facilitate the integration process, which includes, but is not limited to, collaborating with USCIS to make Citizenship and Immigration Information and Services increasingly available to this population.

PASSED by the Commission on Immigrant Affairs on January 21, 2015.

Unanimously approved by the Commission on Immigrant Affairs on a 8-0 vote with Commissioners Kevin Countie, Jose Gamboa, and Rosalia Austin absent.

Attest:

Connie H. Gonzales, Staff Liaison