

February 12, 2018

Members of the City Council and Mayor Renner
City of Bloomington
109 E. Olive St.
Bloomington, IL 61701

Dear City Council Members:

We would like to express our disappointment that the city council has taken the Welcoming City ordinance off of the agenda for February 12, as a result of a letter in which council members Schmidt, Mwilambwe, Painter, Bray, and Sage express opposition to the ordinance and request to halt the discussion of it.

We would like to use this opportunity to urge each of you to consider our [compromise ordinance](#) and to ensure this ordinance comes up for a vote in a timely manner. In addition, we would like to address some of the reasons cited in the letter to the city manager for opposing the ordinance.

Interactions between BPD and ICE *are happening* and they erode community safety, are an unnecessary expense of city money, and create fear within the immigrant community.

Both Chief Heffner and council members have expressed that “BPD has not turned anyone over to ICE.” To verify this information, the local chapter of the ACLU, a member of our coalition, requested all correspondence between the BPD and ICE for the past three years. Although some of the correspondence is redacted or missing, it is clear from the *nearly 200 pages* of emails released to us that there has been repeated communication between the BPD and ICE during this period.

[We identified specific instances from 2015, 2016, and 2017 where BPD initiated contact with ICE to voluntarily offer up individual residents of our community.](#) In these instances, it did not appear the interaction was necessary to facilitate any investigation of a state or local crime in our community and that the only reason these individuals were not taken into ICE custody then was because ICE was not interested in pursuing them at that point. If BPD continues to draw a bullseye on our residents, more of these individuals will end up in detention and deportation as ICE ramps up enforcement operations.

The compromise ordinance fills the gaps the TRUST Act left open -- creating real trust.

The letter claimed an ordinance is unnecessary because the TRUST Act has been passed. To some extent, we agree -- the last ordinance suggested by the city *does* merely restate the TRUST Act with a few additional provisions. We do not need a city law that only restates state law and claims to be welcoming. However, the original ordinance we proposed, and the compromise ordinance we are proposing now, both recognize the TRUST Act, and enhance protections for undocumented residents. But far from being unnecessary and “redundant,” the compromise ordinance is *extremely important* for public safety.

For example, the TRUST Act does not regulate whether a BPD officer can ask about immigration status while conducting a traffic stop for another reason. Nor does the Act regulate whether a BPD employee can contact ICE about someone who is merely suspected of violating a student visa. The TRUST Act says nothing about how BPD will act when ICE comes to Bloomington requesting assistance in conducting a raid on local businesses. These interactions are not addressed by state law and we need the city council to provide the police department with clear directives on what is acceptable in our city.

[Our partners at the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, co-authors of the TRUST Act, agree with our analysis.](#)

This ordinance is not an attack on the Bloomington Police Department.

Rather than “cast[ing] unfavorable and unfair criticism on our outstanding police force,” we believe this ordinance will give our police force the tools to better serve the community and facilitate relationships with *all* of Bloomington’s residents. The police benefit, as we all benefit, from clear, simple rules designed to reduce fear and foster trust. There is fear in our city. As the FOIA records reveal, individuals are justifiably afraid that coming to the attention

of BPD in any way may result in BPD informing ICE. Acknowledging and addressing the causes of fear are the first steps towards increased trust and public safety for everyone.

Anti-immigrant sentiment has been alive and well in Bloomington long before discussion of this ordinance, as many immigrants in our community will attest to.

By seeking public discussion, and ultimately, public policy to protect immigrant families, we are not creating divisiveness--as the letter from the five council members suggests--but merely exposing the divisions that have long existed in our community, and that arguably led to the political moment that has made this ordinance urgent and necessary.

Our call for a substantive Welcoming City ordinance is not a radical demand or call to arms, but rather an *insistence that we come together to define our community as a safe place for all residents to call home*. Those who view the spirit of this ordinance as contentious or controversial should examine the values that are the foundation of *their* sense of community.

Letting fear lead us will lead us to fail our friends and neighbors. We should lead with the values that uphold a welcoming community, without yielding to what appears to be a small minority of residents who harbor anti-immigrant sentiments. Our community stands with those who have come from afar to call Bloomington home. People have testified by the dozens, and mobilized en masse, to call on our local council to take action to protect immigrants from deportation.

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.” - Edmund Burke

President Trump’s immigration policies are singling out immigrants of color--documented and undocumented--for increased deportation. In 2017 alone, the number of non-criminal immigrants arrested increased by 250 percent. To make matters worse, each day that DACA legislation is not passed in Congress, approximately 122 immigrants lose their deferred action status, leaving them undocumented and at risk for deportation.

The suggestion made by those tasked with leading our city that we should sit idle and wait for these state and national policies to resolve themselves--while the Trump administration’s inhumane detentions and deportations tear families apart--makes our city complicit those racist actions. Our community is not immune from the effects of said policies.

Currently, every community is faced with a critical choice: stand silently by and remain complicit with President Trump's racially charged deportation efforts ... or use local power to protect their immigrant neighbors. Our city council must act. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated, “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. *Not to act is to act.*”

Bloomington residents have spoken up loud and clear -- the time for the city council to enact a *meaningful* Welcoming City ordinance is now.

If the cost of holding such a meeting in accordance with the Open Meetings Act is unsurmountable for the City, we would be glad to offer space where this meeting can be held. We will continue to contact you individually to discuss our compromise ordinance in hope of gaining your input and support.

On behalf of the Keep Families Together Campaign,

The ACLU of Central Illinois
Black Lives Matter BloNo
CAUSA
Illinois People’s Action
The Immigration Project
League of Women Voters McLean County
Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington-Normal
YWCA McLean County