

Holcomb is right to welcome refugees in Indiana

In stark contrast to his predecessor, Governor Holcomb has taken both the humanitarian and the practical approach to a global issue by expressing his support of refugees resettling in Indiana. While the federal refugee resettlement program had been a bipartisan and largely uncontroversial issue historically, that legacy has been called into question by louder and more xenophobic voices in recent years. This was no doubt the motivation behind President Trump's September Executive Order that authorized states and counties to veto refugee resettlement at the local level. The order, coupled with the wide reduction in refugee arrivals during the past 3 years, seeks to widely dismantle the infrastructure of the US resettlement network.

Holcomb's public affirmation of the importance of this program continuing in Indiana demonstrated his understanding of the role refugees play in the Hoosier state as well as the humanitarian imperative of assisting those who have faced persecution in their home countries. In his letter committing Indiana to welcoming refugees, Governor Holcomb stated, "Our long tradition of welcoming and helping to resettle refugees with support from our federal partners, shows the world the compassion of Hoosiers and our willingness to give others the ability to grow and prosper in the great state of Indiana." Hoosier hospitality is in fact alive and well.

Likely coming as a surprise to the Trump administration, Holcomb was one of 42 governors who indicated their support to continue the refugee program in their states in response to the September Executive Order with only Governor Abbott of Texas attempting to pull his state out of resettlement.

Notably, the Executive Order that spawned this supportive response from the vast majority of America's Governors has already been taken to court and knocked down. On the 15th of January, Maryland US District Judge Peter Messitte stated in a preliminary decision what many in Indiana already knew – refugee resettlement is a federal program and governors and local officials do not have the power to exclude refugees from their communities as doing so "does not appear to serve the overall public interest."

The refugee resettlement program is one of the best things we do as a country. Welcoming refugees brings new cultures, languages, and vibrancy to our communities; gives hope to those who have faced persecution and exile from their homes; allows America to live up to our global leadership position; supports allies in places like Iraq and Afghanistan; and helps replenish and stimulate our economy by both filling jobs that sit vacant and by creating new ones.

With 26 million refugees globally, wrangling over the few thousand refugees the US will admit this year seems insignificant, but I can assure you it is not. For the life of one refugee, this is a stance worth taking. For the future of one refugee family, it is a battle worth fighting. I applaud Governor Holcomb's commitment to welcoming refugees and hope his example will help inspire moral courage from national leaders who could use a dose of Indiana's Hoosier Hospitality.

-Cole Varga, Executive Director, Exodus Refugee Immigration