

Reaffirming Our Commitment to Sanctuary and Welcoming

A Joint Statement by Beaverton's Diversity Advisory Board and Human Rights Advisory Commission, and the Human Rights Council of Washington County

October 1, 2018

There are moments in history that present opportunities to define who we are as a community and who we want to be. Moments when we are tested on how we stand by the most vulnerable and marginalized in our community when things get tough. This is one of those times. Diversity is inevitable in the US as this country was founded on it. In the midst of one of these moments, we strongly reaffirm our commitment to being a sanctuary community.

The three boards represented by this statement – Beaverton's Diversity Advisory Board and Human Rights Advisory Commission, and the Human Rights Council of Washington County -- share the core values of justice, inclusion, and equity. Our paths cross in advocating for historically marginalized, "invisible" and exploited communities. We have provided direction and advocacy on issues of equity and inclusion, affordable housing, homelessness, economic rights, educational opportunities, racial profiling and community safety, access to equitable healthcare, and more. We claim sanctuary as another essential value that must guide our work.

Sanctuary means providing a safe place, absent of persecution, where people are embraced and supported to better themselves and their community. It means defending the rights and dignity of persons who seek protection. It means welcoming the stranger because we believe that opening our doors and welcoming, building relationships across differences, and reaching out to help all thrive will always outweigh the benefits of choosing to live in fear and isolation. It does not mean eliminating accountability for unacceptable behavior, ignoring injustices or allowing lawlessness. Most of us agree that the immigration system in this country is fundamentally broken and in dire need of reform. But trying to solve a federal policy issue by undermining the trust and security we've built at the local level simply makes no sense.

The reasons we feel committed to building sanctuary in our cities, county and beyond are numerous. Our individual and community safety depend on it. Our demographics demand it. Our desire to be a healthy, thriving community with a strong future leads us to it. And the hard work we've done to build an identity as a welcoming community reaffirms it.

The recently released "Leading with Race: Research Justice in Washington County" report gives us a picture of who we are today. One third of our county's population are people of color. Seventeen percent of residents in the county are immigrants and refugees and over 75% of those have lived in the US for almost a decade or more. In addition, the prevalence of mixed-status families means that a commitment to sanctuary has broad-reaching impacts beyond the individuals directly impacted by this issue. Data shows us that the immigrant community is less likely to commit crime as they strive to prove that they, also, are worthy of living in a better place than the one they left behind. Many are here not by choice, but because their lives have been interrupted by wars, cruelty of their governments, global economic forces, and coups promising

democracy. As the United States has a history of engaging in those very interruptions, we cannot turn away people fleeing from the negative conditions our government helped create.

We believe that all individuals have a basic right to feel safe, be treated with respect and dignity, and have the opportunity to pursue a livelihood, family, safety and happiness, as enshrined in our Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Independent of immigration status, the rate of incidents in which people of color have been targeted by messages of hate and exclusion has spiked significantly over the past few years. We believe that this is in part a product of increased affirmation of hateful and anti-immigrant rhetoric based on myths. Individuals shouldn't have to live in constant fear of disclosing their federal immigration status. Hard-working, contributing members of our community shouldn't have to feel that they're putting themselves and their families at risk by simply going about their daily lives.

We believe that our entire community is safer if there is trust between residents and the law enforcement agencies that exist to protect us all. Trust makes it possible for individuals to feel safe reporting crimes, to come forward as crime witnesses, and to collaborate with police to further community safety. If people feel they have become targets for the very entities that pledge to protect them, community policing strategies are destined to fail. Asking local law enforcement and public officials to play the role of immigration officials pits members of the community against each other and leaves local priorities by the wayside. To live up to our core values, we must ensure that public services and benefits (including public safety) are provided to all residents, regardless of immigration status.

The fear of public institutions that exists among many undocumented community members and their families is being amplified in the current political climate. This fear, along with institutional barriers, hinders access to basic healthcare, education, and jobs. The K-12 school environment has become more and more challenging for youth, and college-aged students and DACA recipients feel threatened and struggle to succeed. All of these factors lead to a less healthy community and increased poverty, with long-term detrimental effects on youth in our community.

Together we have worked hard to build a welcoming community and we believe that our commitment to sanctuary is directly in line with this work. While we are still learning what it looks like to exemplify these values in action, we know that we must start from a place of recognizing our multiculturalism as a core strength. We invite others to join us in affirming their commitment to sanctuary in this important moment as a key building block to inclusion and unity.