



NEWS RELEASE

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“Minnesota Nice” Isn’t Enough, Says Groundbreaking Report

In Minnesota, laws and policies create climate of exclusion, fear for refugees and immigrants

Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN (04/02/14) – When it comes to Minnesota’s immigrants and refugees, “Minnesota Nice” doesn’t come close to providing the most basic protections of people’s human rights, according to *Moving from Exclusion to Belonging: Immigrant Rights in Minnesota Today*, a groundbreaking report being released today by Minnesota-based The Advocates for Human Rights.

In addition to delving into the challenges and abuses of immigrants and refugees, *Moving from Exclusion to Belonging* identifies what is working to promote integration and success, what is failing, and what gaps exist in public policy. The report sets forth recommendations for policymakers and others.

“While immigrants and refugees reported finding Minnesota a ‘welcoming’ place, they also reported experiencing significant human rights violations,” said Robin Phillips, executive director of The Advocates for Human Rights.

In Minnesota, immigrants and refugees live in a state plagued by some of the nation’s worst racial disparities in the areas of employment, health, civic engagement, and educational outcomes, according to the Minnesota Department of Health 2014 report, *Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota: Report to the Legislature*. Immigrants and refugees with legal status often remain ineligible for public safety net programs, and they face difficulty establishing new lives in Minnesota due to lack of credit history, recognized credentials, or social and professional networks. Parents and teachers struggle to communicate while schools tackle the challenge of educating a student population that speaks more than 230 languages at home, according to the Minnesota Department of Education.

And discrimination against Muslim immigrant communities continues in employment, immigration, and religious expression.

Federal immigration policies and programs create conditions for due process violations and for racial profiling by local law enforcement to fester, she said. As an example, Phillips points to the fact that Minnesota law does not allow drivers licenses for those who cannot prove their lawful presence in the United States, creating a whole host of challenges for people.

Pointing to another example of exclusion, The Advocates’ report points out that the Minnesota law enacted in 2005 that makes labor trafficking a criminal offense remains unused. Yet, reports of exploitation of undocumented workers—including wage theft, false imprisonment, assault, and trafficking—continue to surface.

More than two years in the making, the report draws on more than 200 interviews and 25 community conversations held throughout the state.

“While the Advocates for Human Rights specifically documented the experiences and perceptions of refugees and immigrants in this report, it recognizes that experiences highlight – and indeed have been

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allowed to occur because of – the longstanding failure to protect the human rights of all Minnesotans regardless of race,” said Phillips.

The Blandin Foundation, The Minneapolis Foundation, and the Andrus Family Fund provided support for the project.

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The report can be downloaded at:

http://theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/04_02_14_moving_from_exclusion_to_belonging.pdf

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About The Advocates for Human Rights

For more than 30 years, The Advocates for Human Rights has promoted and protected human rights here at home and around the world. The non-profit organization, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, documents human rights abuses, advocates on behalf of individual victims, provides free legal representation to people seeking asylum, works to prevent violence against women and girls, spearheads public policy and legal change, educates about human rights issues, and provides training and technical assistance to address and prevent human rights violations.