On January 7, 2019, the Commissioners for Beltrami County, where Bemidji State is located, took a vote on the resettlement of refugees to Beltrami County. President Trump’s executive order invited counties and states to opt in or out of the resettlement of refugees, who are owed protection and shelter under state, federal and international law. The Commissioners voted 3-2 to reject the resettlement of refugees in Beltrami County.

The County board’s decision sends a hostile message to refugees and other immigrants. In spite of this, the Bemidji State University Faculty Association (BSUFA) unequivocally welcomes refugees and other immigrants, as our colleagues, as our students, and as our neighbors. Refugees and other immigrants have contributed richly to our campus community, and to our Beltrami community, and we celebrate this heritage.

It was evident at the County board meeting that prejudice is central to the division in Beltrami. The BSUFA also rejects any suggestion that race, color, religion, language or national origin is a reason for treating migrants with suspicion. This prejudice betrays principles of respect and equality that define our profession and our county, when they are at their best. It betrays the fundamental values of Bemidji State, which has committed itself to promoting international and multicultural understanding. Fears of refugees are often sustained by misinformation and mistrust; and so we pledge ourselves to building common ground in our community, on the basis of inclusivity and factual thinking. We respectfully invite and encourage all members of our community to invest in this dialogue, knowing that we are stronger together than we are divided.