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**CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS**



**HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION AND  
CITIZENSHIP**

**CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S. REFUGEE PROGRAM  
FEBRUARY 27, 2020 – 2:00 PM**

Thank you, Madam Chairman, for convening this important hearing on the current state of the United States Refugee Program.

The issues which have emerged during the last three years strike the heart of American democracy. I rise to express my grave concern about what is occurring within our complex immigration system and acknowledge the conditions in which the system is greatly suffering.

A study conducted by Houston Public Media showed that in 2017, the first year of Mr. Trump's presidency, the average asylum denial rate in Houston was 87 percent although the state of Texas, especially the city of Houston, has been known to welcome immigrants. The Trump administration's oppressive policies have limited resettlement. The Texas Tribune reported a 79% decrease in refugee resettlement between October 2016 and March 2017 when 3,518 people were resettled, compared to 736 people between October 2017 and March 2018.

According to the New American Economy, immigrant households within Houston hold significant economic power, earning \$50.9 billion dollars in 2016 – with \$9.2 billion going to federal taxes and \$3.5 billion going to state and local taxes.

The Migration Policy Institute found that the Nigerian population in Houston more than doubled between 2010 and 2017 – a statistic that will now dwindle, due to Nigeria’s placement on the Trump administration’s travel ban.

The Associated Press discovered that since 2016, U.S. authorities have adopted a practice called “metering”, under which they accept only a limited number of asylum-seekers per day at official crossings. This has resulted in a huge waiting list at border towns in Mexico – about 19,000 people were on waiting lists in 4 cities last July.

The President’s failure to properly govern and address immigration policy has clearly caused the degradation and destruction of the system. I worry for the lives that are lost every day at the border, in Immigrations and Customs Enforcement custody and for those attempting to come to the United States to have a chance at a new life.

Refugees and asylum seekers coming to the United States have become a group that are politically powerless and have reached the highest levels of vulnerability within our legal system. The brutality with which Mr. Trump undermines the fundamental rights of immigrants because they are not United States citizens is truly heartbreaking and must immediately be corrected.

Mr. Atem – as a refugee, your presence is truly appreciated and I look forward to hearing your testimony today.

Thank you for convening this hearing, Madam Chairman.

I yield back.