

**House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship**

Hearing: The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program

**Statement for the Record
Bethany Christian Services**

February 27, 2020

Chair Lofgren, Vice Chair Jayapal, Ranking Member Buck, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on a very urgent and pressing issue and allowing the submission of this statement to further explain and detail Bethany's resettlement of and support for refugees. Through public-private partnerships with nonprofit organizations like Bethany, the United States has long been a place of refuge for people who are unable to return to their homes, fearing persecution because of what they look like or what they believe.

I. Introduction

Bethany Christian Services is an international nonprofit headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan that provides services to children and families and has supported refugees for over 40 years. Bethany's programs support resettled refugee adults and families as well as unaccompanied refugee minors (URM). Through a network of churches, individuals, and businesses that employ refugees in several states across the nation, Bethany helps resettled individuals and families become vibrant, integral parts of our communities.

II. Refugees' Contributions to Communities

Refugees are vital to the continuing prosperity of our communities – they pay taxes, help grow our economy, and bring unique skillsets, experiences, and insights. Collectively, over 5,000 refugees have been hired in Michigan since 2009 through Bethany's Refugee Employment Program. In 2019, Bethany's Refugee Employment Program placed 301 refugees with over 100 employers, a sharp decline from past years because fewer refugees were resettled. In 2019, these refugees collectively earned approximately \$8 million, barely half of what refugees earned and contributed to the West Michigan economy in 2017. Refugees strengthen our communities and help shape opportunities for continued growth by joining the workforce in critical positions, starting businesses, buying homes, and contributing tax revenue.

III. Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

Since 1975, Bethany has supported unaccompanied refugee minors in the U.S. with family and community-based care and services designed to help them thrive. On any given day, more than 300 unaccompanied refugee minors are cared for in the U.S. through Bethany. In fact, Bethany finds homes for more unaccompanied refugee minors than any other organization in the United States, with the state of Michigan welcoming more refugee minors than any other state.

Of the 70 million displaced people and over 26 million refugees in the world, unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) are among the most vulnerable. URMs often live indefinitely in refugee camps or child-led households in heavily impoverished areas and are susceptible to human trafficking – both sex and labor trafficking – and exploitation. Since the inception of the URM program in 1980, approximately 13,000 URM children have resettled in the United States. These children have come from countries such as Sudan, Myanmar, and Cuba—where many were persecuted for their faith or witnessed the genocide of their families and communities.

Increasing conflict and rising inequality are contributing to the mass displacement of children, including URM, from their homes, endangering their survival, disrupting their education, and exposing them to severe protection risks, including trafficking, violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. At the same time, U.S. support for URM has fallen precipitously. In FY 2015 the U.S. resettled 294 refugee children, compared to only 116 in FY 2018 and 156 in FY 2019 – a significant decline in just five years.

While the total number of children resettled through the URM program is relatively small, the program has a tremendous impact on the children it serves. Children in the URM program receive the same care and benefits provided to U.S. born children placed in foster care. The URM program provides culturally and linguistically appropriate foster care to unaccompanied refugee children and youth. Through the program, unaccompanied refugees receive care, educational support, and case management to help the children thrive and achieve self-sufficiency.

The U.S. should commit to increasing the life-saving refugee resettlement practices in a way that reflects the gravity of the global refugee crisis. This includes a continued strong commitment to unaccompanied refugee minors.

IV. Conclusion

We care for refugees not based on their faith beliefs or the color of their skin, but because they too are made in the image of God and have dignity and worth. Supporting the refugee resettlement program upholds our country's history of being a beacon of safety and hope for those in need. With over 70 million forcibly displaced people across the globe, we must continue to seek proactive solutions that alleviate the suffering of refugees worldwide. Developing countries host 85% of the world's refugees, while the six wealthiest nations host fewer than 9%. In Jordan alone, 80% of refugees live below the poverty line, struggling to survive on [less than \\$3USD per day](#). There are over [26,000 asylum-seekers and refugees](#) currently residing on the Aegean islands, a number just short of the total number of refugees admitted to the U.S. in FY19. The United States can do better. The lives of millions of displaced children and families depend on it.

Sincerely,



Chris Palusky
President and CEO
Bethany Christian Services



Dona Abbott
Senior Vice President of Global and Refugee Services
Bethany Christian Services

