



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Statement Submitted to the House Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, for the Hearing Entitled, “The Current State of the U.S. Refugee Program” February 27, 2020

For 80 years, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has assisted forcibly uprooted people from around the globe. As one of the oldest and largest resettlement agencies, we seek to provide assistance and protection to vulnerable populations when they can no longer safely remain in their home countries. Informed by a Lutheran legacy of welcoming the stranger and decades of experience with migrants and refugees, we have empowered more than 500,000 families and individuals fleeing conflict, persecution, and war.

While our legacy of compassionate service has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people who have found safety and hope in America’s communities, the continual reduction of refugee admissions since 2016 is a devastating loss for our communities, inconsistent with our values as a country and puts lives at risk as we face the worst refugee crisis in recorded history. This fiscal year the refugee admissions cap was set at 18,000, the lowest since the start of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in 1980. It is profoundly disappointing that at a time of unprecedented need, the United States would reduce the number of refugees it welcomes and abandon our commitment of resettling refugees.

Over the years, we embraced and celebrated the diversity that refugees have brought to the United States. Refugees’ strong sense of faith and rich cultural traditions bring new life to our congregations and communities. They work in important industries - construction, food, service, transportation, and medical care, and quickly become self-sufficient and contribute to the local and state economies. Research and government studies have shown that refugees quickly become part of the workforce, contribute billions of dollars in taxes and generate U.S economic growth.

Past administrations have recognized these contributions and supported refugee resettlement which is reflected in the strong bipartisan support. Presidents of both parties have led and raised refugee admissions in times of crisis. President Reagan signed the Refugee Protection Act of 1980 into law with strong bipartisan support. Recently, when states were asked through an executive order to consent or block refugee resettlement to their state, only one state government chose to block it.

Refugees are powerful ambassadors of our founding principles of equal opportunity, religious freedom, and liberty and justice for all. Rather than closing the door to refugees, we should be welcoming them, their families, their talents and contributions. The U.S. was once the global leader in refugee resettlement. We must work to return to our leadership position and uphold the legacy of welcome towards refugees.

LIRS and its network of local service providers and Lutheran congregations across the country have historically played key roles in assisting refugees with housing, language, employment, and social supports necessary for their integration into our communities. This commitment to assist refugees as they start their new lives in the United States is a testament of our principles to love our neighbor, accompany the vulnerable, and welcome the stranger. Communities of faith continue to stand in partnership to help refugees of all faiths find safety and hope as they start their lives as new Americans.

LIRS is grateful to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Citizenship and Immigration for its leadership in supporting refugees, and we urge all members to support the increase of U.S. refugee admissions.