

Toolkit for Winter 2017-2018: Local Congressional Visits to Protect Refugee Resettlement

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The Power of Advocacy

As refugees and friends of refugees, we know that the need is greater than ever for policy makers to understand the broad support for refugee resettlement. The administration's executive order on October 24th banned refugees from 11 countries for an additional three months, indefinitely banned refugees from reuniting with their spouse and children through the following to join process, and mandated onerous and unnecessary data requirements that will impact all refugees awaiting resettlement. All of these changes are in addition to the multiple refugee and Muslims bans that the administration has put in place since January 27th. Our voices and action are needed more than ever.

Be an Advocate

Developing relationships and educating your policy makers are necessary steps to winning welcoming policies and attitudes toward refugees. A powerful constituent visit involves impacted communities and allies who join together. Having a team of refugee leaders, resettlement staff, volunteers, employers, faith groups, and other community members who meet regularly is essential in building meaningful relationships with policy makers. It is important that policy makers understand that their constituents care about refugees, and that refugees are their constituents — they live, work, and contribute in their communities, obtain U.S. citizenship, and vote. As our [local](#), [state](#), and [national](#) leaders consider proposals that will impact refugees, the time is now to urge them to stand with those seeking safety.

Your Voice Matters

Your story as a refugee, staff member, or supporter of refugee resettlement is your most important qualification as an advocate. Talk about the way your community welcomes refugees and the positive contributions refugees make to your community. Refugees, resettlement staff, faith leaders, employers, military veterans, and supportive community members are constituents of local, state, and national elected leaders who regularly make policy decisions that impact refugees. When policy makers know that their constituents care about refugees, they will increasingly vote to support refugee protection and resettlement, as well as productive policies that help refugees. It's important to note that 501(c)3 organizations can confidently educate policy makers about who refugees are and how policy proposals will impact their community. The IRS holds that 501(c)3 organizations can take positions on public policy issues, and that lobbying is acceptable, as long as it is not a substantial part of the organization's work and/or is less than 20% of a non-profit's budget. There are also special permissions for religious groups.

Engaging National and State Elected Leaders

At the national and state levels, individuals who oppose refugee resettlement are making their voices heard loudly and frequently to policy makers. These groups utilize anti-refugee, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim rhetoric and draft legislation to engender fear and foster hostile atmospheres for newcomers. More than [80 bills](#) have been introduced in the U.S. Congress that would dismantle or significantly damage the U.S. refugee resettlement program. In 2015, [31 governors](#) voiced opposition to resettling Syrian refugees and more than [50 anti-refugee proposals](#) were introduced across 19 state legislatures in 2016. (Only one of these proposals passed, thanks to everyone's hard work.) In 2017, we faced 36 anti-refugee proposals across 20 states (only two were enacted), but we also saw 33 pro-refugee proposals introduced in 18 states. It is critical that policy makers hear from refugees themselves and supportive community members. We want policy makers to support positive legislation and oppose proposals that would turn our backs on refugees and violate our values of welcome and hospitality.

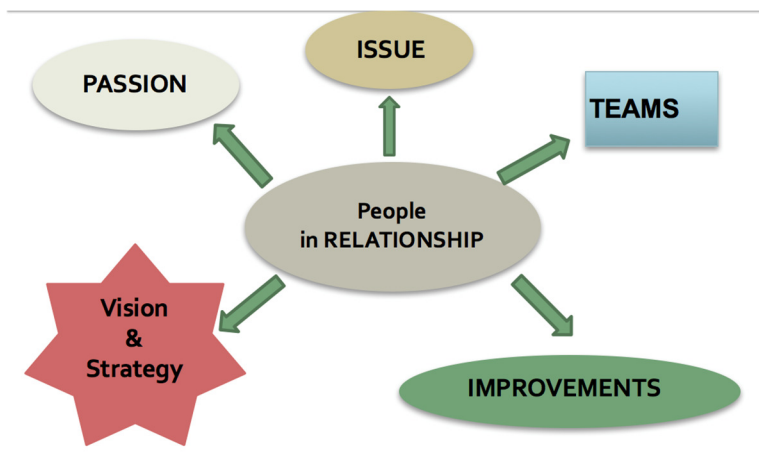
Engaging Local Policy Makers

Efforts to stop refugee resettlement in certain communities have been gaining traction, making it critical for local policy makers to hear from us and affirm that they welcome refugees. There are positive proposals that local elected officials can adopt to affirm the importance of resettlement and foster communities of welcome. City, municipal, and other local councils and commissions need to hear that their communities stand ready to help refugees integrate and thrive. Cities and counties across the nation have passed resolutions affirming they are welcoming, inclusive, and ready to accept refugees of all backgrounds, countries of origin, and faiths. Urge your local leaders to adopt welcoming resolutions that extend hospitality to refugees and all newcomers. Organizing community members around a welcoming resolution reflects a core American belief in the dignity of every person, lifts up diversity as a community's strength, and cultivates an environment of inclusion. Local officials can also write supportive public letters to the White House, Department of State, and Congress stating their opposition to executive orders that are dismantling refugee resettlement. Click [here](#) for a framework one community developed to assess itself and facilitate welcome and inclusiveness of refugees and immigrants.

Where to Start: Teambuilding

The art of teambuilding is a critical component to advocacy. Teambuilding brings together diverse voices – such as resettlement staff, refugee leaders, faith leaders, and others – who speak to the importance of welcome and helping refugees integrate and thrive from several perspectives. This is how you can get started in creating and sustaining teams of people who can take action together for change.

Visualizing Teambuilding



How Do I Build a Team?

Step 1: Internal Assessment

What are you passionate about? Why? What in your life journey has brought about this passion?
What policy changes (national and local) are impacting you and your community?
What policy changes (national and local) would you and your community like to see?
How could you see your community working to be part of bringing that change about?
What does being an “advocate” mean to you?

Step 2: One on One Relationship Building

Face to face meeting in a mutually preferred location
Intentional conversation, not an interview
Listening for passion, vision, stories
Work together to identify other people who would be interested in joining you
Each agree to reach out to people who share your vision and help build / energize a team

Step 3: Grow Your Team

Who else might care and be interested?
Ask each person to reach out to 3-5 more people and have one-on-one meetings
Set a timeline for a team meeting

Step 4: Bring the Team Together

Goal: bring together a solid group of 8-20 people
Create a common vision: what are our hopes and expectations?
Create an action plan: How do we build toward bringing that vision to life?
Who are natural allies who can be energized into being advocates and champions?
Identify next steps, including ways to engage with policy makers and other influential people.

*For more information on how to engage in organizing and teambuilding, click [here](#).
Connect with refugee and immigrants’ rights group near you: www.informedimmigrant.com/organizations/.*

Meeting With Your Senators and Representatives

Who You Are. Why You Care. What You Want.

It is more important than ever to meet with your local, state, and national policy makers to educate them about the vital role that refugees and all newcomers play in your communities, and the negative consequences of executive orders that are dismantling refugee resettlement. Because the process of change takes time, meetings with policy makers should be viewed as part of a continuing process of gathering and sharing information, building relationships, and developing and carrying out advocacy strategies. Members of Congress will be in their states and local offices for from November 17th to November 27th, from December 15th January 3rd, and from January 22nd to January 28th.

Building Power for Refugee Resettlement

A good time to meet with your Members of Congress and/or their staff is during Congressional recesses when they are in their states and local offices. Calendars of in-district time for the remainder of 2017 can be found here: [Senate](#) and [House of Representatives](#) and the 2018 House schedules is available here [House of Representatives](#) (Senate schedule TBA). Schedules fill up very quickly for these recess periods, so reach out as soon as possible.

Steps to Prepare and Organize Your Meeting

1. Create an advocacy team: An ideal team consists of different stakeholder voices such as refugees, case workers, faith leaders, business leaders, military veterans, and community leaders who can all share in the planning, outreach, and coordination of advocacy actions and speak to the diversity of support for refugee resettlement. Convene in advance to discuss current relationships with policy makers, goals, asks for the meeting, what you want to learn, and an agenda for a successful meeting.

2. Learn about your elected officials: Are your Members of Congress in Congressional leadership, or on the [Senate](#) or [House](#) Appropriations Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Judiciary Committees; [Senate](#) or [House](#) Homeland Security Committees; or [Senate](#) or [House](#) Foreign Relations Committees? If so, they have jurisdiction over various aspects of the refugee program. Even if they aren't in leadership or on these committees, their vote is still important, and they can still be champions for refugees. *Note: To learn more about your governor, state legislators, mayor, and local officials, click [here](#).*

3. Have a plan: Before you enter an advocacy visit, meet with your group beforehand to assign roles:

- *The Facilitator* starts the meeting, introduces the group, explains the purpose for the meeting, and provides time for each person to briefly introduce themselves and their organization and/or connection to refugees, to show that the group represents thousands of community members. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
- *The Personal Story* is key to every meeting. A refugee should tell their story to show how peoples' lives are changed through refugee resettlement.
- *Specific Issue Points* - It will be helpful to bring handouts about your asks (found in this toolkit). Stories of welcome by state are available [here](#) and [here](#). Information on refugees by state can be found [here](#).
- *The Ask for All Leaders* - The critical part when you ask "Will you be a champion for refugees and oppose any and all anti-refugee proposals, including the recent executive order dismantling the refugee program?"
- *The Ask for Local/State Leaders* – "Will you champion a welcoming resolution to declare our community a city/state of welcome?" Find a sample resolution and sample letter in this toolkit that local policy makers can send to the White House and Department of State supporting resettlement.

4. Debrief: It's important to debrief as a team in a separate location following the meeting. As a group, ask: What did we hear and learn? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps? How can we engage this policy maker in the future, perhaps through event invitations, etc.? Share your reflections with your organization's advocacy staff (see last page for contact information).

5. Follow-up: Send a thank you email to the staff after the meeting with any information they asked for and any other relevant information you think would be helpful. Inviting the staff and/or official to an upcoming event to meet with refugees is an excellent next step!

5 Ways You Can Share the Holiday Spirit with Refugees

While millions of Americans celebrate the holidays with their families and look forward to a new year, thousands of refugees will not be as merry. Due to President Trump's October 24th executive order banning refugees from 11 countries for three months, indefinitely banning refugees from reuniting with their spouse and children through the "following to join" process, and mandating onerous and unnecessary data requirements, many refugees in the U.S. remain separated from their families and refugees abroad who had already been promised safety remain stranded in dangerous situations.

All of these changes are in addition to the multiple refugee and Muslims bans that the administration has put in place since January 27th to effectively dismantle the refugee resettlement program. [Current projections](#) show that if refugees will be admitted at the current pace under these new restrictions, only an estimated 15,000 refugees will enter the United States this year, far lower than the 45,000 refugee cap for 2018, which was already the lowest refugee admissions goal in U.S. history.

We are in the midst of the worst displacement crisis the world has ever seen, with more than 22 million refugees worldwide. The U.S. resettlement program is proven to be the safest in the world, ensuring refugees undergo extensive vetting. Further, the program advances our national security interests and invests in the American ideals of freedom around the world. We must make our voices heard against these systematic attacks against refugees and the accompanying anti-refugee, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sentiment in which they are based.

During the holidays, you have the power to speak out. No matter where you are from, the value of family togetherness is something all of us can relate to. Here are 5 ways you can take action in solidarity with refugees this holiday season:

1. **Meet with your Members of Congress** when they're in their state and district offices from [November 17th to November 27th](#), [December 15th to January 3rd](#), and [January 22nd to January 28th](#). Request to meet with them or their staff. Let them know your opposition to the latest refugee ban and urge them to support refugee resettlement. [Click here](#) for a toolkit on setting up a meeting with your Members of Congress and building an advocacy team.
2. **Click actnow.io/ZUYLi6E** to receive a call and be patched through to your one Representative and two Senators. Or **call 1-866-961-4293** three times and use [this script](#) to express that as a constituent, you oppose the latest refugee ban and to share how it impacts your community.
3. **Make your voice heard with friends and family, and on social media.** It's the holidays! If you're passionate about refugee and immigrant rights, [click here](#) to download the "Surviving the Holidays: How to talk to family about refugees & immigrants" guide. You can also Tweet and post on Facebook, tagging your [Members of Congress](#) and asking them to support refugee resettlement. You can upload a short video of your family talking about the parallels of Thanksgiving and the refugee crisis today. Link to graphics and informational materials at GreaterAs1.org and use these hashtags: #RefugeesWelcome #NoMuslimBanEver #GreaterAs1 and ask your friends to post too.

Sample tweets and Facebook posts:

[@memberofcongress](#): Happy holidays! Please share the holiday spirit with those who most need it. Support refugee resettlement and oppose the latest refugee ban. #RefugeesWelcome #NoMuslimBanEver #GreaterAs1

[.@memberofcongress](#): Happy Thanksgiving! Refugees give thanks every day for a country that has allowed them to live a better life. Please support refugee resettlement and oppose the latest refugee ban. #RefugeesWelcome #NoMuslimBanEver #GreaterAs1

Use the same message for Facebook, tagging your Members of Congress.

4. **Write Opinion Editorials and Letters to the Editor** stating your support for refugees and your opposition to the ongoing refugee bans. [Click here](#) to view sample letters you can send and [here](#) for more resources.
5. **Hold a public event** like this [#WhereRtheRefugees Interfaith Vigil in Texas](#) to lift up impacted refugee community members and push back on the latest refugee ban. Invite refugees, refugee service providers, faith leaders, veterans, and local elected officials to speak during the event. Even small events, multiplied across the country, will send a powerful message to the Trump administration and Congress that welcoming immigrants and refugees, and standing alongside Muslim community members are part of our values as a country. Find resources on how to host an interfaith vigil at bit.ly/InterfaithVigilToolkit. **Or host a multi-cultural dinner** in your community and invite refugees to share their stories. Sitting down together to share a meal is a timeless tradition that unites across all cultures and religions. This is a great way to show hospitality and to urge policy makers to support refugee resettlement. Many civic groups and congregations have hosted dinners that double as a fundraising event to collect donations and funds to help refugees rebuild their lives in the United States. Check out the [Refugees Welcome toolkit](#) will help you prepare a dinner that will build relationships and understanding around refugee resettlement. Click [here](#) for resources on engaging local media outlets. Also, it's not too early to start planning an event on January 27, 2018, which will mark the one-year anniversary of the signing of the first refugee and Muslim ban. [Click here](#) to join the Washington, DC mobilization, or organize a local event near you!

ACTION ALERT

URGENT: Tell Congress and the White House that you OPPOSE Trump's Latest Refugee Ban

Background: On October 24th, President Trump released a new executive order to:

- Ban refugees from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mali, North Korea, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and stateless Palestinians for 90 days, in addition to the 120 day refugee ban that expired on October 24th.
- Indefinitely suspend the following to join process for refugees who have been separated from their spouse and children as they have fled for safety.
- Require all refugees to provide a phone number and email address for every one of their relatives, as well as all the places where they have lived for more than 30 days, going back 10 years. This is difficult to obtain information for anyone, yet alone refugees who have been on the move, seeking safety. This additional processing will delay many refugees, including those who have already been approved, for years. All of the additional information gathering requirements could reduce by half the ability of the U.S. to process refugee applicants for resettlement.

Make no mistake - this is another refugee ban by a different name. The Trump Administration is trying to dismantle the refugee resettlement program however they can, in a series of changes that will result in long delays, family separation, and vulnerable refugees who have no option for safety. The Administration cannot claim that it is reopening the refugee resettlement program when it is layering on policy changes that will halt the program. This order is gut-wrenching for our community members who are waiting to be reunited with a family member, and for refugees overseas with no other options for safety than to be resettled. It is critical that all Members of Congress and President Trump hear their constituents decry these announcements and declare their support for refugees from all over the world.

CALL YOUR SENATORS & REPRESENTATIVES TODAY: 1-866-961-4293

Please call 3 times to connect with your Representative and both of your Senators

OR you can enter your information at <http://actnow.io/ZUYLi6E> to receive a call and be patched through

Sample Script: "I'm your constituent from [City, State], and I support refugee resettlement. I strongly oppose President Trump's latest executive order to grind refugee resettlement to a halt. This is a ban by another name, is morally reprehensible, and does not reflect the welcome for refugees I see in my community every day. I urge you to do everything in your power to see this executive order rescinded."

Please also share a personal story about why refugee resettlement is important to you and your community. Let them know the specific ways that refugees contribute and are welcomed into your community. You can also tweet @ your [Senators/Representatives](#) and @realDonaldTrump with the same message!

Suggested Tweets:

.@realDonaldTrump @YOUR[Senators/Representative](#) Stop the refugee ban. Resettlement demonstrates the best of our values #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1

.@realDonaldTrump @YOUR[Senators/Representative](#) Keep America welcoming. Refugee resettlement is a proud American legacy with bipartisan support #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1

[@RealDonaldTrump](#) @YOUR[Senators/Representative](#): #Refugees are already the most vetted group to enter the US. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1

.@realDonaldTrump's latest executive order is a refugee ban & we stand against it.

@YOUR[Senators/Representative](#) stop the refugee ban! #GreaterAs1 #RefugeesWelcome

Please spread the word and send this alert to your networks!

[Please tell us if you take action opens a new webpage!](#)

Follow [@RCUSA DC](#) on Twitter and "like" [Refugee Council USA](#) on Facebook for up-to-date alerts.

Talking Points: Most Recent Refugee Ban Executive Order

- The Administration's announcement effectively dismantles the refugee resettlement program. These announcements will affect nearly every refugee waiting for resettlement. It also means that we will see very few refugee arrivals in the next few months and throughout the next year.
- This is another refugee ban by a different name. The Trump Administration is trying to dismantle the refugee resettlement program however they can, in a series of changes that will result in long delays, family separation, and vulnerable refugees who have no option for safety. The Administration cannot claim that it is reopening the refugee resettlement program while simultaneously layering on policy changes that will halt the program.
- The Administration's goals are as odious as their tactics: to completely disrupt and dismantle the refugee resettlement program brick by brick. Now that their first and second attempts have been blocked (in part) by the courts, they are trying to achieve the same result of grinding resettlement to a halt through these new policy changes.
- As a result of these changes, hundreds, possibly thousands of individuals and families that have already gone through the exhaustive vetting process in good faith and were promised refuge in the United States will see their eligibility revoked and be exposed to even further danger. The disruption to the program will have severe long-term consequences for nearly every refugee awaiting safety.
- Resettlement is already the last resort for individuals who are unable to return to their home countries and can't rebuild their lives safely in the country where they fled, so these individuals will have few, if any, options for protection.
- What are the problems that the Administration is trying to solve? Refugees already undergo the strictest security vetting of anyone coming to the United States, with the Departments of Defense and State, the FBI, and National Counterterrorism Center all involved, and including in-person interviews with the Department of Homeland Security.
- We are committed to the security of the refugee program and to working with the Administration on any security measures that would make the program safer and more efficient, as long as they are conducted in good faith.
- The 11 nationalities affected includes Iraqis who work/worked to support the U.S. Government and U.S. efforts in Iraq, further delaying their access to safety.
- The refugees that come here embody American values and helping refugees is essential to what it means to be an American.
- Refugees are fleeing the same kind of terror which we have seen unfolding around the world. We can't forget who refugees are – they are the families, the children, and the most vulnerable among us who have lost everything. They have lost friends and family. They have lost their home.
- What unites us as Americans is our deep respect for hard work and a shared commitment to the country we call home. Refugees are seeking a new place to call home and that is what the refugee resettlement program offers – a new home and chance to build a safe and prosperous life.
- This E.O. is the latest of many instances where this Administration has circumvented Congress.
- Statistics prove that the refugee resettlement program is the safest immigration program in the United States. Since 1980, of the more than 3 million refugees have been resettled in the U.S., not one has committed a terrorist act here. Yet some in the Trump Administration willfully ignore the facts and have created an alternate reality and intentionally spread mistruths in the hopes they will move the country one step closer to their personal world view.

Employer Roundtable: Set Up Roundtables to Support Refugees

*There are countless opportunities for you to **create a team** that represents an important sector of the community that supports refugees. By convening a group of individuals together to speak to their individual and collective reasons for supporting refugees in their community, you can amplify individual support for refugees into a strong unified message. We encourage you to bring together a diverse group of individuals, from all walks of life and industries, not forgetting to include refugees themselves, to meet with local and national leaders.*

Your teams can hold roundtables with members of your Congressional delegation, local elected leaders, and other community leaders, all with the aim of speaking in support of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

Employers:

If you employ refugees, you know how important their contributions are to our economy – both locally and nationally. Gather other employers of refugees in your district or state and meet with your members of Congress and other elected leaders to share stories of the hard work refugees do to contribute to your business. Utilize your networks to identify and convene a large group of employers who can speak to the economic contributions of refugees. Meetings could include business owners, CEOs, managers, and former refugees who now own businesses.

Faith Leaders:

If you are a faith leader, you understand how meaningful it is to have refugees join and participate in your faith community, as well as the importance of welcoming the stranger and protecting the most vulnerable in your faith tradition. Gather leaders with diverse faith backgrounds in your district or state to share stories of the perspective and life refugees bring to your congregations and communities. Groups could include Bishops, Pastors, Imams, Priests, Rabbis, and other faith or community voices.

Veterans:

Veterans have dedicated their lives to supporting and defending the rights of Americans – including refugees. As someone who has served their country, you know that protecting the world's most vulnerable is part of our country's legacy and is also in the best interests of our national security. Many veterans have served alongside local persons as guides, interpreters, and more who now are seeking safety from the persecution they face due to their role in supporting U.S. troops. It's important elected officials here these stories and continue to uphold promises to our allies who need protection. Groups could include veterans, reserve and guard forces, or active duty U.S. Armed Forces.

First Responders:

As with Veterans, first responders have dedicated their careers to saving and defending the lives of all Americans – including refugees. First responders are committed to protecting all in times of need. A group of first responders could include police officers and other law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel in your state or district.

Diverse Group of Voices:

Alternatively, you could construct a roundtable that includes representatives from each group, demonstrating how much refugees mean to various parts of a community. You could convene employers, faith leaders, veterans, and first responders and hold roundtables with your members of Congress or elected leaders together.

Other Voices:

Don't fit into a category above? No problem – convene a group of interested voices and schedule a meeting. It could be a group of local NGOs who work on varied issues, or just a group of concerned community members who want to tell their elected leaders why they support refugees. Just remember, bring along educational materials to leave behind with the office once you've met with them.

Media & Outreach Resources

Writing & Pitching an Opinion Editorial (Op-Ed)

When drafting an opinion piece, research the outlet you are submitting to. Many have a word limit between 750-1200, though some can be as low as 300 or 500. Please feel free to use the points in the draft op-ed below as you write your own opinion article, or feel free to write directly from the heart - what you have to say deserves to be heard!

When pitching your op-ed, it is important to keep your pitch short and on message. Most outlets require you to pitch via email on a form on their website. It is important to keep your pitch as short as possible, as reporters are often on a deadline and receive many story pitches every day. Open your pitch with an interesting first line and relate the pitch back to another story the reporter has recently written to increase the likelihood of the reporter picking up your story. Please see the draft pitch below for an example email.

Be sure to research the outlets and reporters in your area. Who are the top current event, immigration, or political reporters in your area? Have they written about refugees before? If so, how can you tie your event into their previous work? Answering these questions and using them to draft your pitch will help increase the chances of your welcoming event being covered and featured as an exclusive in a larger outlet.

Draft Pitch Email for Op-Ed

Subject: Submission: Faith leader op-ed on supporting refugee resettlement

Dear Editor,

My name is _____ and I'm the _____ of [organization]. As the global community faces the largest displacement crisis in history, our organization/congregation is preparing to resettle refugees and do our part to create a welcoming community. (include brief details about why you're writing about refugees).

My experiences inspired me to author the attached op-ed, reaffirming the need for us all to work together and create an inclusive community. In light of recent anti-refugee and anti-Muslim rhetoric in particular, this piece offers a timely response and highlights the urgent need to create a welcoming place for all people.

Please feel free to contact me at EMAIL or over the phone at PHONE NUMBER if you have any questions or would like to discuss the piece in greater detail. Thank you in advance for your consideration!

Sincerely,
NAME

Sample Faith Leader Op-Ed

Welcoming Refugees: It's a Matter of Faith

I reflect how from the earliest days of [Sunday school/Hebrew School/Seminary], my faith has taught and called me to welcome the stranger, stand with the vulnerable, and love my neighbor. Now, as a **father, minister, and [Tennessean]**, I am proud to demonstrate these values in my daily life and weekly sermons at **[name of congregation]**. But it is also because of those values that I am deeply disturbed by recent anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiment espoused by some of our law makers. It sends an unwelcoming and mean-spirited message of exclusion to refugee families fleeing violence and persecution.

Last year's refugee and Muslim ban, as well as the most recent executive order to dismantle the refugee resettlement program are opposite to my beliefs as a person of faith. Refugees are already the most scrutinized individuals entering the United States. To claim that they are security threats to our community not only ignores the unimaginable circumstances they flee and heavily scrutinized path to safety in the United States, but also stokes fear rather than cultivating compassion, truth, and understanding.

From the [earliest books] in the **[Bible/Torah/Quran]**, our faith calls on us to show mercy and hospitality to those fleeing persecution. We are called to treat them with dignity, respect, and love, providing the same welcome that we ourselves would hope for.

[INSERT RELEVANT SCRIPTURE – EX: “Bring water to the thirsty, meet the fugitive with bread... For they have fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the stress of battle.” - Isaiah 21:14-15; “And (as for) those who believed and fled and struggled hard in Allah’s way, and those who gave shelter and helped, these are the believers truly; they shall have forgiveness and honorable provision.” (Quran 8:74); “And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:19)]

As Americans, we live in a country built in part by the hard work, dreams, and determination of generations of immigrants and refugees -- many of whom were our ancestors. Sadly, it seems that our legislators have forgotten these lessons and have acted with fear instead of compassion.

Today, I am asking all Members of Congress to do everything in their power to protect the refugee resettlement program. Refugees are mothers, fathers, and children. They are doctors, teachers, lawyers, business owners, craftsmen, and musicians. As the world searches for solutions to the largest displacement crisis in history, with more than 21 million refugees worldwide, we have a moral and legal obligation to refugees seeking a chance to rebuild their lives and create a better future for their families. These people are no different than our **[Biblical]** ancestors who were once refugees who found welcome and were called to do the same.

I urge our elected lawmakers to ensure **[State]** is providing refugees a chance to live, work, and go to school in safety. To do otherwise would be to dishonor our legacy of welcome and hospitality and fall short of our values.

Sample Refugee Leader Op-Ed

Take it From Someone Who Has Been in Their Shoes: We Must Welcome Refugees

My name is **[name]**, and I’m **[career, family, etc.]** I came to the United States as a refugee from **[country]** **[time]** years ago. My family and I were forced to leave everything behind after **[personal story]**.

Today, I reflect on my journey and am so grateful to the United States and my new community for giving me another chance at life.

As with many refugees, I would have preferred to remain in my homeland. However, **[share why you needed to move, and that the journey was difficult and long]**. After experiencing such traumas, I faced other challenges while resettlement, such as **[name a few of these challenges]**. What made the biggest difference in overcoming these hardships--and in healing from past traumas--has been the welcome received when I joined my new community. **[Name a few ways you were welcomed, and tell how that made you feel.]**

As someone who understands the struggles of refugees firsthand, I am disheartened to see that my beloved new home is denying that same opportunity to others now facing similarly dangerous situations.

I always viewed America as a beacon of hope. The executive orders banning Muslim immigrants and refugees do not reflect that. In fact, they completely contradict the values America stands for: compassion, welcome, and resilience. The United States is a country where anyone should be able to pursue the American Dream and live in safety.

The fear, hate, and xenophobia perpetuated by the continued refugee bans do not reflect the **[STATE] and America** I know. The **[STATE] and America** I know is compassionate in its acceptance of those seeking shelter from some of the worst conflicts in history.

Today, I am asking all Members of Congress to do everything in their power to protect the refugee resettlement program. I continue now to believe in the importance of welcoming others--for others have welcomed me. As someone who knows firsthand the horrors that refugees flee and the sense of hope finding a home brings, I urge our local leaders, state legislators, and national policy makers to stand with refugees--today and every day. Only then will we truly reflect the welcome our country stands for.

Together, we can inspire welcome across the country and around the world.

Sample Tweets

Contributions and Benefits of Refugees in Our Communities

- [Name of group, family, etc.] is ready to welcome refugees! #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1 (photo)
- My community is better with refugees. They [pay taxes, create jobs, start businesses, bring cultural diversity, open restaurants, etc.]. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- We celebrate the diversity and resiliency #refugees bring to our communities! Stop the Refugee Ban. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- Making #RefugeesWelcome involves teamwork! NGOs, faith communities, community groups & others all chip in. Stop the Refugee Ban. #GreaterAs1
- Refugees across the US add value: working, learning English, paying taxes, opening businesses & becoming citizens. Stop the Refugee Ban. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- Entire communities benefit from refugees, esp when we invest in welcoming early on, equipping them to thrive. Stop the Refugee Ban. #GreaterAs1
- Every year, #refugees open businesses, revitalize towns, become citizens & give back to the communities that welcomed them. Stop the Refugee Ban. #GreaterAs1
- #Refugees bring their resiliency & experiences to help make our communities better. Stop the Refugee Ban. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- How Many #Refugees Arrived in the #USA Last Month? Check out the @RCUSA_DC #RefugeeReportCard. #RefugeesWelcome <http://www.rcusa.org/blog/rcusa-monthly-report-card-october-2017>

Refugee Facts

- 51% of #refugees are children. What if that was someone you know? Stop the Refugee Ban. #GreaterAs1
- Every minute, 24 people are forced to flee their homes because of war or persecution. Stop the Refugee Ban. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- The US has been a global leader in the protection of refugees and must continue to set an example as a safe haven. Stop the Refugee Ban. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- Since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, over 3 million #refugees have found safe haven in America. Stop the Refugee Ban. #RefugeesWelcome #GreaterAs1
- The US Refugee Resettlement Program is a lifesaving, public-private partnership for #refugees with no other means of finding safety. Stop the Refugee Ban. #GreaterAs1

Please click [here](#) for more sample social media posts.

Sample Letter to Your Members of Congress

[Date]

The Honorable [Senator/Representative] (find this information at www.senate.gov and www.house.gov)
[room number] [name of congressional office building]
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

As your constituent, I urge you to do everything in your power to protect the refugee resettlement program in the United States. Over sixty-five million people are displaced globally, including over 22 million refugees, the largest number in recorded history. The administration's executive order on October 24th banned refugees from 11 countries for an additional three months, indefinitely banned refugees from reuniting with their spouse and children through the following to join process, and mandated onerous and unnecessary data requirements that will impact all refugees awaiting resettlement. All of these changes are in addition to the multiple refugee and Muslims bans that the administration has put in place since January 27th.

Refugees are of special humanitarian concern to the United States and are a testament to our nation's long, proud history as a beacon of hope. To be admitted to the United States, refugees must demonstrate that they have a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, and must undergo rigorous security screenings, including biometric checks and interviews with specialized and well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a private/public partnership that is integral to U.S. foreign policy and national security.

[Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes, and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community—can include examples of refugees creating jobs, starting businesses, opening restaurants, bringing cultural diversity, buying homes, paying taxes, etc.]

Our office in [city/state] has helped resettle [X number of] refugees in the past year alone. Since the office opened in [date], over [X number of] refugees from [X number of] countries have embarked on a path to reach their full potential and enjoy safety, security, and a second chance in life. Refugees have opened businesses, revitalized towns, and become productive members of communities that welcomed them. Many become American citizens and see their children graduate from U.S. schools.

Refugees are a testament to the United States' long, proud history as a sanctuary for those who seek lives free from violence and oppression. I call on you to do everything in your power to protect the refugee resettlement program and oppose the continued refugee bans. My community welcomes refugees and immigrants, and I invite you to meet with refugees next time you are in your home office. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me if you have any questions.

With Appreciation,
[your signature and contact information]

Sample Letter to Send to Your State and Local Leaders

[Date]

[Title] [To find your governor, state legislators, mayor, and local officials, click [here](#)]
[room number] [name of office building]
[City, State Zip Code]

Dear [TITLE Last Name]:

As your constituent from [city, state], I urge you to welcome refugees, support the U.S. refugee resettlement program, and declare our [city/county/state] a “Welcoming City.” I would also urge you to write the State Department to show your support for resettlement. Resettlement is a strong American legacy that extends hospitality and offers a chance for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. Every day, more community members than ever before are volunteering with resettlement offices around the country to help refugees integrate and thrive.

The United States has a long history of providing protection to persons seeking safety from persecution. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. led humanitarian assistance efforts to help displaced persons, including resettling hundreds of thousands of Europeans to the United States, including Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. During the Cold War period, the U.S. welcomed refugees from Vietnam, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. Today, we resettle Darfuri refugees fleeing genocide, Bhutanese refugees forced out of their country, Syrian refugees who have fled mass violence and human rights atrocities, Iraqi and Afghan refugees who served alongside the U.S. military, and many other populations in need of lifesaving protection. Refugee resettlement is a public / private partnership that celebrates the hospitality, resilience, and freedom that our communities hold dear.

Refugees are forced to flee their homes because they face persecution on account of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Over 65 million people are displaced globally, the largest displacement crisis in recorded history, including over 22 million refugees. Resettlement offers a chance for less than 1% of the world’s refugees to reach safety in a third country when no other options remain. Resettlement to the United States is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous selection, security vetting and medical screening process.

[Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes, and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community—can include examples of refugees creating jobs, starting businesses, opening restaurants, bringing cultural diversity, buying homes, paying taxes, etc.]

Our community is home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants, adding to the economic strength and cultural richness of our community. We have been an example of a hospitable and welcoming place to all newcomers, where people thrive and the contributions of all are celebrated and valued. As cities across the United States have declared themselves to be welcoming to refugees and immigrants, we urge to adopt a resolution declaring [City/County/State] a “Welcoming City,” one in which all are welcome, accepted, and appreciated.

Please stand with us as we welcome refugees and affirm the richness of our community. We invite you to come visit our office and meet with refugees [perhaps include event information]. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me about how we can be supportive of moving a welcoming resolution forward.

With appreciation,
[your signature and contact information]

SAMPLE LOCAL WELCOME RESOLUTION

RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE CITY/COUNTY OF [NAME] AS A WELCOMING CITY/COUNTY THAT CELEBRATES THE GROWING DIVERSITY OF ITS RESIDENTS AND ACNOWLEDGES THAT REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS, AND ALL NEWCOMERS ENHANCE THE CULTURE AND THE ECONOMY

WHEREAS, there are more than 65 million displaced people have been forced from their homes, more than any time in recorded history, including over 22 million refugees;

WHEREAS, millions of refugees – regardless of faith or country of origin – are making life and death decisions to flee their homes and neighboring countries because they are unable to access shelter, health care, education, or protection, and neighboring countries have either closed their borders to new arrivals or violence persists in those countries as well;

WHEREAS, resettlement is available to a very small portion of the most vulnerable refugees and provides safe haven in a third country when no other options for safety are available;

WHEREAS, resettlement to the U.S. is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection – such as unaccompanied and other at-risk children, female-headed households, victims of torture, the physically disabled, members of the LGBTI community, and members of minority groups that are experiencing oppression in the host country – and takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous selection, security vetting, and medical screening process;

WHEREAS, the [City/County] of [Name] is home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants, adding to the economic strength and cultural richness of our community;

WHEREAS, organizations responsible for resettling refugees in our community, as well as numerous other community organizations and religious institutions, have declared their support for resettling refugees in [CITY];

WHEREAS, the [City/County] of [Name] has been an example of a hospitable and welcoming place to all newcomers, where people, families, and institutions thrive and the contributions of all are celebrated and valued;

WHEREAS, cities across the United States have declared themselves to be welcoming to refugees and immigrants, joining a national movement for creating an inclusive community;

WHEREAS, residents of [City/County] of [Name] aspire to live up to our highest societal values of acceptance and equality, and treat newcomers with decency and respect, creating a vibrant community for all to live in;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY/COUNTY OF [NAME], that the [City/County] of [Name] is hereby declared a Welcoming City, and one that affirms the beauty and richness of our diversity, and one in which all are welcome, accepted, and appreciated.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the [City/County] of [Name] hereby urges other local and state communities to join us in a stronger national effort to resettle the most vulnerable refugees worldwide and help them integrate and thrive.

Adopted this the X day of [Month Year].

Draft Letters for Local Officials to Send the White House & State Department

[Date]

Dear President Trump and Secretary of State Tillerson:

Welcoming refugees shines a light on Americans' most cherished common values. As a community in [CITY, STATE], we believe in the strength of the U.S. refugee resettlement program and welcome refugees from all backgrounds, faiths, and countries of origin. This commitment reflects a core American belief in the dignity of every person, lifts up diversity as a community's strength, and cultivates an environment of inclusion. Resettlement is a strong American legacy that extends hospitality and offers a chance for refugees to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity. Every day, more community members than ever before are volunteering with resettlement offices around the country to help refugees integrate and thrive.

Refugee resettlement is the living embodiment of the religious commitment to "welcome the stranger," a bedrock upon which much of America's strength rests. In our community, churches, synagogues, mosques, and other communities of faith stand in partnership to help refugees of all faiths find safety and hope as they start their lives as new Americans. The United States has a long history of providing protection to persons seeking safety from persecution. In our community, we have welcomed refugees from [describe where refugees in your community have come from and the struggles they faced on their journey to the United States.]

Refugees are forced to flee their homes because they face persecution on account of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Over 65 million people are displaced globally, the largest displacement crisis in recorded history, including over 22 million refugees. Resettlement offers a chance for less than 1% of the world's refugees to reach safety in a third country when no other options remain. Resettlement to the United States is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection and takes place after eligible refugees undergo rigorous selection, security vetting and medical screening processes.

The resettlement program is a prime example of a public/private partnership between the federal government, the state government, and local communities and their agencies and volunteers. [Local agency name] helps refugees who have been resettled in [state] by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, English-language classes, and community orientation. Refugees are resilient, hard workers whose innovative skills have contributed greatly to our state. [Describe positive impacts refugees have on your community—can include examples of refugees creating jobs, starting businesses, opening restaurants, bringing cultural diversity, buying homes, paying taxes, etc.]

Please stand with our community as we welcome refugees. We invite you to come visit our office and meet with refugees [perhaps include event information]. Thank you for your public service, and please contact me if you have any questions about refugee resettlement in our area.

With appreciation,
[your signature and contact information]

**Your local policy makers will know how to send correspondence to the White House and State Department. Encourage them to also send the letter to your Senators and Representative, and also please share a copy with your agency's advocacy staff, contact information on last page, so we can see how many have been sent and ensure that Administration officials and members of congress see them.*

Advocacy Resources & Contact Information for Advocacy Staff

Resources

- [RCUSA refugee 101 backgrounder](#)
- [RCUSA background on the security screening process](#)
- [RCUSA refugee arrival tracker and monthly Report Card](#)
- [Refugee Resettlement State Profiles](#)
- [Letters and articles, national and state-by-state, demonstrating welcome for refugees](#)
- [Letter from former Secretaries of the Department of Homeland Security](#)
- [Letter to Congress from 20 Former National Security Officials](#)
- [Quotes from faith leaders in opposition to refugee executive order](#)

National Sign On Letters Demonstrating Commitment to Refugees

- Letter from 5,000+ religious leaders in support of resettling refugees of all faiths: www.interfaithimmigration.org/5000religiousleaderletter
- Letter from the Evangelical Immigration Table in support of refugee resettlement: <http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/cms/assets/uploads/2015/12/EIT-Syrian-refugee-letter.pdf>
- Letter from more than 1,000 rabbis calling on elected leadership to support refugee resettlement: www.hias.org/sites/default/files/1000_rabbis_support_refugees_160115.pdf
- Letter from 4,000 + Catholic sisters, priests, and brothers in support of resettling refugees of all faiths <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/news/catholic-religious-sign-letter-support-refugee-resettlement/>
- Former National Security Officials Statement on America's Commitment to Refugees: www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/STATEMENT-ON-AMERICAS-COMMITMENT-TO-REFUGEES.pdf

Security Screening and Refugee Processing Backgrounders

- Department of Homeland Security Refugee Screening Fact Sheet: www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Refugee,%20Asylum,%20and%20Int'l%20Ops/Refugee_Security_Screening_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Department of Homeland Security USRAP Flow Chart: www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Humanitarian/Refugees%20%26%20Asylum/USAP_FlowChart_V9.pdf

State-by-State Resources

- RCUSA State Profiles on Refugee Resettlement: www.rcusa.org/state-refugee-profiles
- Interfaith Immigration Coalition State-by-State Articles and Demonstrations of Welcome: www.interfaithimmigration.org/2015/12/03/welcoming-refugees-state-by-state-resources/

Additional Advocacy Toolkits

- Interfaith Immigration Coalition Neighbor-to-Neighbor Toolkit: www.interfaithimmigration.org/neighbor
- Refugees Welcome Toolkit: www.refugeesarewelcome.org/refugees-welcome-toolkit_final-8-5-16/
- My Neighbor is Muslim Toolkit: <http://lirs.org/myneighborismuslim/>

Executive Order Against Refugees and Muslims

- Talking Points, Section-by-Section, Asks for Members of Congress: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UX73gwC7JH7i1DXeDREvqpE71o4h3NFso5az33Bt2uk/edit?usp=sharing>
- FAQs on President Trump's Refugee Executive Order: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JA_14yqO7Mi4SK3p-yqROpg2N13PEvhnfpd-LpLeJTE/edit?usp=sharing

The following advocacy staff represent organizations working with refugees:

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