



May 19, 2016

Simon Henshaw
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State

RE: Public Notice 9528
Notice of Public Comments on FY 2017 U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Dear Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Henshaw,

Cities for Action is a national coalition of over 100 mayors and county executives that advocates for stronger policies to welcome and embrace those who are foreign-born. Our guiding principles include increasing protections for and minimizing obstacles to refugees and asylum seekers fleeing various forms of crisis, and committing to secure necessary resources to ensure the successful resettlement of refugees and asylum seekers into local communities. We appreciate the opportunity to submit a formal comment on the Fiscal Year 2017 U.S. Refugee Admissions Program to the U.S. Department of State.

Cities are uniquely invested in refugee resettlement. As heads of city agencies, we experience firsthand the positive contributions of refugees in our cities. They have become our neighbors, colleagues, and classmates. They are woven into the fabric of our communities and our country, and make us stronger economically, socially, and culturally. We support the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and applaud the President for increasing the ceiling for refugee admissions for Fiscal Year 2016.

In recent years, cities throughout the nation have been establishing offices and initiatives to help welcome and integrate newcomers, laying the local foundation for the Refugee Admissions Program's success. We have worked to promote the integration of our foreign-born residents and will continue to do so among any additional refugees resettled in our cities.

A few examples from our coalition demonstrate the breadth and depth of localities' commitment to immigrants and refugees:

Clarkston, Georgia has the most ethnically diverse square mile in the United States, and 50% of its residents are foreign-born. Many faith communities thrive and violent crime is among the lowest in its state. One of its most valued residents is a Syrian refugee who graduated at the top of his class at Clarkston High School and became a cardiologist at Emory Hospital. He is giving back to his city by working with the mayor to develop a pre-medical program at his former high school.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania has four refugee resettlement agencies that welcome 500 refugees every year. Over the last decade, Bhutanese, Somali-Bantu, Burmese, and Iraqi refugees are among the largest groups that have made Pittsburgh their home. The city recognizes that it benefits as diverse cultures and experiences connect longtime residents with new ones. Therefore, the city routinely partners with community-based groups to develop programming aimed at receiving and integrating new refugees.

In September 2015, 18 mayors in our coalition submitted a letter to President Obama commending his commitment to accepting more refugees into the United States amid the crisis in Syria and offering their support in resettlement efforts.

Unfortunately, there are still far too many people in our world fleeing their homes for survival. Providing refuge to those with a dire need for safety and welcoming them into our communities is more than our obligation; it is fundamentally part of our identity as the United States of America to be a global leader in being a haven for those fleeing oppression and seeking freedom.

While the President's increased ceiling for refugee admissions for Fiscal Year 2016 to 85,000 people demonstrated the recognition of the increased global need, ongoing situations throughout the world suggest that the need exceeds this number and that the United States should expeditiously process resettlement applicants. Our cities have taken in refugees and will help make room for more. This is because there is a robust screening and background check that assures us that we know who we are welcoming into this country. With this system in place, we stand ready to support the Administration in increasing the numbers of refugees we can accept.

Therefore, we urge the U.S. Department of State to recommend that the President establish a higher ceiling for refugee admissions into the United States for Fiscal Year 2017. Refugees are part of our cities' cultural and economic vitality, and we look forward to supporting the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program in welcoming more.

Sincerely,

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