

November 24, 2015

BY EMAIL

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Maryland State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401
governor.hogan@maryland.gov

Dear Governor Hogan:

We, the undersigned civil rights, faith, labor, humanitarian, social justice, and immigrant and refugee service provider organizations write to express our strong support for welcoming refugees in the State of Maryland. The world is witnessing the largest refugee crisis since World War II. More than 4 million Syrians have fled from their home country to escape conflict and violence, and 6.5 million are internally displaced. Maryland has a long and proud tradition of welcoming with open arms those who flee persecution and death. We urge you to reconsider your statement asking that Syrian refugees not to be directed to our state, and to stand with your constituents in upholding that proud tradition.

At a time when the world needs humanitarian leadership, calls for restricting the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Maryland only serve to stoke fear and hate and to jeopardize our moral leadership. Syrian refugees are fleeing exactly the kind of terror that unfolded on the streets of Paris. They have suffered violence just like this for almost five years. Many if not most have lost loved ones to persecution, violence, and starvation, in addition to having had their country, their community, and everything they own brutally taken away from them.

Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group of people who come to the United States. Security screenings are rigorous and involve the Department of Homeland Security, the FBI, the Department of Defense and multiple intelligence agencies. Department of Homeland Security officials interview each refugee to determine whether they meet the refugee definition and whether they are admissible to the United States. Refugees undergo a series of biometric and investigatory background checks, including collection and analysis of personal data, fingerprints, photographs, and other background information, all of which is checked against government databases. This process typically takes more than two years—often much longer—before the refugee would arrive in the U.S. In the meantime, refugee families often live in destitution in countries where their legal status is tenuous and where they are subjected to extremely difficult social and economic conditions. There is no need for state officials to stoke the flames of fear and hatred by demanding a halt to resettlement in their states or imposing additional restrictions or security measures.

The United States decides which refugees to resettle. Because so few refugees in the world are resettled, the U.S. often chooses the most vulnerable, including refugees who

cannot remain safely where they are and families with children who cannot receive the medical care they need to survive.

To turn our back on refugees is to betray our core values as a welcoming, diverse state that benefits from the contributions of all our immigrant communities. It sends a demoralizing and dangerous message that our state is making judgments about people based on their country of origin and their religion. This feeds into extremist propaganda and makes us all less safe. We call upon you to demonstrate leadership by speaking out against the scapegoating of any group during this time of crisis and to ensure that our state's humanitarian efforts are robust.

Maryland is a welcoming state with a diverse society, and our willingness to take in refugees who are being resettled to the United States must continue to reflect this.

We can welcome refugees while ensuring our own security. Refugees have enriched communities across our country and have been part of Maryland's fabric for generations. Historically our state has taken in refugees fleeing most major wars or conflicts, and has helped resettle individuals and families from Europe, Africa, South East Asia, South and Central America, and the Middle East. Closing the door to refugees would be disastrous and a rejection of some of our most fundamental values.

We are not made unsafe by the presence of Syrian refugees among us. We are enriched and blessed by the skills and diversity they bring, and we believe we are upholding our most dearly-held values by embracing them in our midst. We urge you to reconsider your statement and to join us in welcoming Syrian—and all other—refugees to our state.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland
Asylee Women Enterprise
Ayuda
Baltimore Palestine Solidarity
Bill of Rights Defense Committee
Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
CASA de Maryland
Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Inc.
Council on American-Islamic Relations – Maryland
Defending Dissent
Episcopal Refugee and Immigrant Center Alliance
Identity
Immigration Clinic, University of Maryland Carey School of Law
Immigration Outreach Service Center
Intercultural Counseling Connection
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
International Rescue Committee in Maryland

Jewish Voice for Peace
Jews United for Peace
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) – Baltimore
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Libertarian Party of Maryland
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Maryland Immigrant Rights Coalition
Maryland Legislative Task Force for Islamic Affairs
Montgomery County Civil Rights Coalition
Montgomery County Young Democrats
Muslim Democratic Club of Montgomery County
NAACP – Maryland State Conference
Open Society Institute – Baltimore
Peace Action Montgomery
Progressive Cheverly
Public Justice Center
Service Employees International Union 32BJ
Soccer Without Borders – Baltimore
Syrian American Council – Maryland chapter
Tahirih Justice Center – Baltimore
United Church of Christ Central Atlantic Conference