

## Local Congressional Visits Toolkit 2015 - 2016

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# **Why It's Important to Meet with Members of Congress about Refugees**

## **Global Context**

60 million people are displaced globally, the highest numbers since World War II. As we witness the desperation of people fleeing to seek safety, the refusal of many countries to accept refugees, the backlash and unwelcoming attitudes of some, and the growing attention and public support for refugees, it is critical that we "think globally and act locally." Many policy makers do not understand the need for refugee protection policies, how the resettlement process works, or the important contributions refugees bring to our communities. The United States needs to be a leader in refugee resettlement, increasing the annual resettlement numbers from 70,000 to 200,000, including 100,000 Syrians, and encouraging other countries to welcome refugees. As people living in the United States, we can help make that a reality. For Members of Congress to support increased resettlement, adequately fund refugee assistance and resettlement, enact positive reforms to improve the lives of refugees, and defeat anti-refugee proposals, they must hear from their constituents and build positive relationships with refugees and allies in their communities.

## **Syrian Refugees**

More than 4 million Syrian refugees are in need of durable solutions, and another 8 million are internally displaced. And yet, the United States has only resettled 1,517 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the conflict and has signaled willingness to accept only 10,000 next year. While resettlement is not the solution to the conflict, it is critical that all countries welcome Syrian refugees and support host countries like Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, which are hosting millions of Syrians. The U.S. should commit to resettling at least 100,000 Syrian refugees, in addition to the increased overall number of refugees that the U.S. admits to the country. Such leadership by the U.S., along with Germany's recent announcement that it will welcome 1 million Syrians, will encourage other countries to follow suit and utilize resettlement as a life-saving protection mechanism.

## **Anti-Refugee Sentiment**

Utilizing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment, individuals who oppose refugee resettlement are making their voices heard louder and more frequently to policy makers. Groups like Refugee Resettlement Watch and similar local groups are calling for an end to refugee resettlement altogether, moratoriums on arrivals to their areas, and fostering unwelcoming atmospheres for newcomers. It is critical that policy makers at local, state and national levels hear from refugees themselves and community members who support refugee resettlement, so they can ask questions, learn more about the importance of resettlement, support positive legislation and oppose proposals that would harm refugees.

## **Positive Reforms to help Refugees and Communities**

There are positive pieces of legislation that have been introduced in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that would improve the U.S. refugee resettlement program. These bills are detailed on the following page of this toolkit, and would, if enacted, help refugees reunite with their family members, integrate into their new communities, and succeed in their new lives. Many of these bills have had bipartisan support, but can only pass if more Members of Congress are knowledgeable and passionate about refugee resettlement, and are held accountable by supportive constituents calling for change.

## **The power of advocacy**

Each refugee resettlement office represents hundreds, if not thousands, of refugees, staff, and supportive community members who are constituents of Members of Congress who regularly make policy decisions that impact refugees. When policy makers know that their constituents care about refugees, they will vote for policies that help refugees and against anti-refugee proposals. Reform of the refugee program, protection for specific populations and increased funding globally and domestically will only happen if refugees, resettlement offices and supportive community members educate and urge their elected officials to champion these reforms.

## **Anyone can be an advocate, at any time!**

Advocacy begins with telling your story. 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, the reasons refugees need more assistance, and the positive contributions refugees make to your community.

## **Ask Congress to Urge the Administration to Admit more Syrians**

While the administration has initially announced that the 2016 Presidential Determination for refugee admissions will be 75,000 and include 10,000 Syrian refugees, these numbers can and should be reassessed, especially in light of the need and the growing public support for increased Syrian resettlement. As we face the continuing escalation of the global refugee crisis with the largest number of refugees since World War II, we urge the United States to increase the number of refugees that we resettle to 200,000 for Fiscal Year 2016, including 100,000 Syrian refugees.

To increase resettlement numbers, the Administration must consult with Congress, so it is very important that President Obama and staff in the White House and Department of State hear from Members of Congress. Inquiries and requests from Members of Congress would help urge the White House to increase resettlement. Already, 70 members of Congress have signed [a letter](#) urging President Obama to admit 100,000 refugees. Many other Members of Congress have called for similar action, including [Representative Pascrell \(D-NJ-9\)](#) and [Senators Durbin \(D-IL\) and Klobuchar \(D-MN\)](#).

Please ask your Senators and Representatives to call, write, and bring up these issues during meetings with the White House and all Administration officials, urging them to increase Syrian resettlement. Below are some helpful points, in addition to the guidance provided by various RCUSA member organizations. See Appendix B for a letter that RCUSA sent to the Obama Administration, which can also be shared with Congressional offices.

**We are facing a global refugee crisis that requires a global response.** 60 million people are displaced, the largest number since World War II. This includes 4 million Syrian refugees and 8 million Syrians who are internally displaced. The global outpouring of public support for Syrian refugees has inspired countries around the world to welcome more refugees, and the U.S. must do our part. In proportion to each country's population, Germany's welcome of 835,000 Syrians would be akin to the United States accepting more than three million Syrian refugees.

**The U.S. has traditionally been a leader in refugee protection and resettlement, and needs to show bold leadership now.** The United States can and should resettle at least 100,000 Syrian refugees this coming fiscal year, in addition to increasing our total resettlement commitment from 70,000 to 100,000 refugees from all parts of the world. The administration's initial announcement about resettling 10,000 is far from what is needed.

**It's been done before, and needs to be done now.** After the fall of Saigon and in response to public outcry about individuals losing their lives as they fled for safety, the U.S. airlifted more than 200,000 refugees in 1980 alone and welcomed a total of 759,482 Vietnamese refugees over the next few years. These individuals are now our friends, neighbors, family and community members. History shows us that where there's a will, there's a way.

**The United States' rising to the occasion now would both encourage European nations to live up to their refugee protection obligations.** U.S. leadership would also help to prevent further deterioration in the protection climate in the countries bordering on Syria that are currently hosting millions of Syrian refugees.

**Refugee resettlement saves lives and enriches communities.** Our community is committed to welcoming more refugees. Share a story from a refugee in your community, and examples of your community's support and involvement in resettlement!

## **Current Legislation That Would Impact Refugees**

*See handouts on these pieces of legislation in Appendix B*

### **The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act, [H.R. 1568](#)**

The human rights violations that have been perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or ISIS) have been widespread and have left more than 10 million people in need of protection and humanitarian assistance both within Syria and in surrounding countries. Christians, Yezidis, Shabaks, Turkoman Shiites, Coptic Christians, Druze, Mandaeans, Assyrians and others have been forced to flee their homes in search of safety and are in need of international humanitarian support. This situation is detailed in the recent RCUSA report [At the Breaking Point: Refugees in Jordan and Egypt](#). H.R. 1568, sponsored by Representatives Vargas (D-CA-51) and Rooney (R-FL-17), would make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program more accessible to persecuted individuals in Iraq and Syria, including those facing gender-based violence and religious and ethnic minorities fleeing ISIS. The bill would also open additional processing entities in the region, increase staff for processing refugee applications, expand the use of video interviewing, and streamline the existing systems for conducting background and security checks.

### **The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform & Modernization Act, [S.1615](#) & [H.R. 2839](#)**

This bill, introduced by Senator Stabenow (D-MI) and Representative Pascrell (NJ- 9) would help both refugees and the U.S. communities that welcome them. Currently, refugees who move to a new state after their initial place of resettlement cannot access important transitional services and support. As a result, many refugees struggle to make ends meet, and many states and local service providers lack the funds to help them. This legislation would increase data collection on secondary migration as a first step to address these issues. The bill would also revise the formula for social services funding so that each state would receive funds based on the number of refugees who have already arrived as well as those projected to arrive the upcoming year. It would elevate the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services. This would give the office broader authority to direct resources more effectively and increase inter-agency communication. The bill would also improve ORR's data collection regarding refugees' housing, mental health and employment needs.

### **The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act, [H.R. 2798](#)**

This legislation, introduced by Representative Ellison (MN-5) would make positive changes to the U.S. refugee resettlement program. If enacted, H.R.2798 would allow refugees resettled in the United States to arrive with a green card instead of having to wait a year to even apply, thus expediting integration. The bill would also extend refugees' access to assistance from eight to twelve months and extend case management services for refugees who are particularly vulnerable. The bill would expand access to pre-arrival English classes, which have been shown to expedite integration, and would reunite separated families and expedite refugee security checks. It would also assist refugees with housing, employment training and recertification, transportation, child care and mental health services. H.R.2798 would establish an emergency fund to help communities meet the needs of refugees in unforeseen circumstances. The bill would also help children who are victims of serious crimes and would prevent the elderly and disabled from having their vital assistance expire.

### **The Resettlement Accountability National Security Act, [H.R. 3314](#)**

This anti-refugee bill sponsored by Representative Babin (TX-36) would completely stop the U.S. refugee resettlement program until both the House and Senate pass a joint resolution to re-establish it. It also calls for a study on how many refugees use various federal benefits and for what duration of time, how many refugees pay taxes during their first year in the United States, and various costs associated with programs utilized by refugees. It may not be helpful to draw more attention to this bill, but it is important to be aware of it so you can answer questions and affirm the importance of the resettlement program and the positive contributions refugees make to their communities.

## **Meet with your Senators and Representatives**

Most Members of Congress will be in their states and local offices during the following in-district work periods: September 21-25, October 12-16, and November 9-13. This is a great opportunity to meet with them and their staff to introduce them to refugees and ask for their support of the resettlement program. Calendars of in-district time can be found at <http://majorityleader.gov/Calendar/> and [www.senate.gov/legislative/resources/pdf/2015\\_calendar.pdf](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/resources/pdf/2015_calendar.pdf).

### **Purpose of In-District Advocacy Meetings on Refugee Issues:**

1. To educate decision makers about the strengths and needs of refugees in your community
2. To understand where they stand and where their interests align with refugee issues
3. To get a commitment of support for refugee resettlement and current legislation
4. To build relationships with public officials and institutions influencing your community

### **Steps to Prepare and Organize Your Meeting:**

**1. Create an advocacy team:** An ideal team consists of refugees, case workers, faith leaders, business leaders, 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. Meet to discuss current relationships with policy makers, goals and ideas, and to plan for a successful meeting.

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

- *The Facilitator* will kick off the meeting by introducing your group, explaining the purpose for the meeting, and providing time for each person attending to briefly introduce themselves. Make sure each participant introduces the organization they represent or their connection to refugee resettlement. The facilitator will also jump in if the meeting goes off-track and redirect the conversation.
- *The Personal Story* is key to every meeting. Someone should be present who is either a refugee themselves or has worked closely with and been impacted by refugees. Telling this story will show how peoples' lives and communities are enriched through refugee resettlement.
- *Specific Issue Points* - There will be specific points your group will want to make about the refugee resettlement program and your local resettlement landscape. It will be helpful to have one person take on each of these issues, as well as key pieces of legislation, to show they are distinctly important.
- *The Ask* is the critical part when you ask "Will you be a champion for refugees and welcoming communities like ours by co-sponsoring *The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act*, *The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act* and *The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act*?" Listen carefully and ask for clarification if their response is vague.

**Suggested Leave-Behind Documents:** It will be helpful to bring the handouts found in Appendix B of this toolkit, as well as letters of support and news articles that show the positive impacts of refugees in your community. Additional handouts with information on refugees by state can be found at [www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/RCUSA%20State%20Profiles%20-%20updated%205.30.14.pdf](http://www.rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/RCUSA%20State%20Profiles%20-%20updated%205.30.14.pdf). Contact your organization's advocacy staff (see Appendix A) for other timely materials.

**3. Debrief:** It's important to debrief after the meeting. As a group, ask: what did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? How did we work together as a team? What are the next steps? Share your reflections with your organization's advocacy staff (see Appendix A).

**4. Follow-up:** Make sure to 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 member to an upcoming event to meet with refugees is an excellent next step!

## **Call The Offices of Your Senators and Representatives**

Calling the offices of your Members of Congress makes a critical difference in their support for refugee resettlement. Everyone can call and ask their Member of Congress to support legislation that would help refugees succeed in building their new lives.

### **Before you call Congress:**

- Be prepared to give your mailing address or zip code, so they can ensure you are a constituent. If your office is not in their district, you can explain that you serve refugee clients in or near their district.
- Write down some specific facts and figures about your office, services your agency provides, as well as a brief and compelling story about a refugee you have assisted so you are ready to share.
- Have a pen and paper ready to write down the name and contact information of the staff with whom you speak and relevant notes from the call so you can follow up and build a relationship with the office.
- Go to your Senators' and Representatives' websites, linked at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).
  - Find out if they have co-sponsored legislation related to refugees or made statements about refugees. Links to relevant legislation can be found in the background section of this toolkit so you can look up co-sponsors. An internet search for their name and "refugee" can also be helpful.
  - Do they sit on the Judiciary Committee, which handles all immigration issues? Or the Foreign Affairs Committee or Homeland Security Committee, which handle overseas assistance and aspects of security checks? Or the Appropriations Committee, which decides how much funding goes to the Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration and the Office of Refugee Resettlement?

**Calling Congress:** You can call the Congressional Switchboard at **202-224-3121** to be connected with your Senators and Representatives offices, or call their Washington, DC office directly at the number on their website. You can modify the script below, but be yourself! It helps to practice beforehand.

### **Sample Script:**

**You:** Hello, my name is **[name]** and I'm calling from **[town]**. May I please speak to the staff who handles refugee or immigration issues for the **[Representative/Senator]**?

**Receptionist:** Sure, that's **[staffer's name]**. I'll connect you. (*Write down the name.*)

**You:** I'm calling from **[town]** to urge the Senator/Representative to support refugees by cosponsoring:

- H.R. 1568, The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act;
- H.R. 2798, The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act; and
- H.R. 2839 & S.1615, The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform & Modernization Act

Thank you for your time. Could I get your email address to send you a follow up email? I'd like to be in touch with you as issues related to refugees are discussed. Please feel free to contact me with any questions about refugee resettlement program in our area. (*provide contact info*)

### **Sample Voicemail Message:**

Hello, my name is **[name]** from **[town]**. I am calling to ask the **[Representative/Senator]** to support refugees by cosponsoring three bills:

- H.R. 1568, The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act;
- H.R. 2798, The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act; and
- H.R. 2839 & S.1615, The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform & Modernization Act

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me at **[phone number / email]** if you have any questions. I look forward to your boss's leadership on these important issues.

**After you call Congress:** Email the staffer to provide materials, repeat your requests and answer any questions asked during the call. Then email your organization's advocacy staff (see Appendix A) so they can follow up to echo the message.

## Sample Letter to Send to your Members of Congress

[Date]

The Honorable [full name of Senator/Representative] (find the following information on their website)  
[room number] [name of congressional office building]  
Washington, DC [20510/20515]

Dear [Senator/Representative] [last name]:

As your constituent, I urge you to support policies that would improve the lives of refugees resettled in the United States and the communities that welcome them. 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 fear persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Before arriving to the United States, refugees undergo rigorous security screenings, including biometric checks and interviews with specialized and well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers.

[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.] The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is a private / public partnership that is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy. I urge you to stand with our community as we welcome refugees, by co-sponsoring:

### **The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act, H.R. 1568**

The human rights violations perpetrated by ISIS have left more than 10 million people in need of protection and humanitarian assistance both within Syria and in surrounding countries. H.R. 1568 would make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program more accessible to persecuted individuals in Iraq and Syria, including those facing gender-based violence and religious and ethnic minorities fleeing ISIS. The legislation would also open additional processing entities in the region, increase staff for processing refugee applications, and streamline the existing systems for conducting background and security checks.

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### **The Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform & Modernization Act, S.1615 & H.R. 2839**

Currently, refugees who move to a new state after their initial place of resettlement cannot access important transitional services and support. As a result, many refugees struggle to make ends meet, and many states and local service providers lack the funds to help them. This bill would increase data collection on secondary migration as a first step to address these issues. The bill would also revise the formula for social services funding so that each state would receive funds based on the number of refugees who have already arrived, as well as those projected to arrive the upcoming year.

I urge you to support these three bills, and to meet with refugees next time you are in your home office. Thank you for your public service and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

With Appreciation,

[your signature and contact information]



## **Lifting up the Power of Refugee Voices**

Elected officials need to hear from individuals who are directly impacted by policies, including refugees. Not every refugee will want to be a public speaker, but it is important to encourage and help refugees develop their voice and public speaking skills to effectively be heard by policy makers. Refugees have powerful stories to share, and allies can help them practice telling their stories in a short way that will move the hearts of policy makers. Sharing these stories in person during meetings with Members of Congress, as well as through photos, videos, blog posts, etc. helps educate policy makers and the public. Make sure to share these stories with your advocacy staff in Washington, DC (see Appendix A) so they can amplify your work in meetings with Members of Congress as well.

**Team Building:** Behind every successful social movement is a network. When a community is effectively engaged, it can develop leaders and ensure advocacy continues and grows. Having a team of refugees and local community supporters who regularly meet and discuss advocacy and public outreach strategies can build sustainable momentum and encourage policy makers to be champions for refugee resettlement. Teams can strategize about public officials to invite to upcoming events to speak, accept an award, teach an English or civic class, and/or meet with refugees to learn about their stories, struggles and successes.

**Civic Engagement:** Civic Engagement is a critical part of the integration trajectory and a great way to lift up the power of refugees in our communities and build champions across party lines at local, state, and national levels. Many refugees are very active in the civic life of their own community, but there is greater need for participation in broader civic institutions. This includes voting, understanding policy issues that impact their lives, educating and encouraging other individuals to vote and make their voices heard, and even running for office. Civic engagement work should be non-partisan. Resettlement agencies do not endorse any candidate or political party. Volunteers can register new voters and distribute voter registration information at community events. Individuals who have not been able to vote in the past, or who are voting for the first time can share their powerful stories at events and/or with the media.

### **Voter Registration Table Checklist**

- ✓ Voter registration cards, absentee and early voting ballots, and relevant information about each
- ✓ Clip boards, a visual flow chart on voter registration and sample scripts for volunteers
- ✓ [Commitment cards](#) asking people to promise to vote on election day and a volunteer sign-up sheet
- ✓ Voter information from your State Board of Elections, including a map of jurisdictions & polling places
- ✓ Signs: “Register to Vote Here!” & “Voter registration available to all, regardless of political affiliation.”
- ✓ Tally sheet for reporting your activity at the end of the day

It is helpful to work with a local organization dedicated to voter registration so they can enter the information into the Voter Activation Network and follow up to ensure a successful voting experience for new voters. Your local county board of elections office will be able to provide you voter registration forms and early voting applications, and can inform you of local rules and deadlines regarding non-profit organizations turning in registration cards or early ballot applications once they are filled out by new voters. There are Voter ID laws in 32 states, which can limit people’s access to voting. Each state also has their own early voting policies. It is important to know the laws in your state and communicate them in conversations with new voters. If your State has a voting ID law, it will be important to inform people so they can prepare to have the necessary identification when they vote. Use these links to customize information based on your state's requirements:

- Voting ID laws by state: [www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx)
- Early & absentee voting by state: [www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx](http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/absentee-and-early-voting.aspx)



## **Change the dialogue and push for change through social media**

Social media is a great way to increase awareness, educate the public and urge your Senators and Representatives to be champions for refugees. Providing your network with sample social media posts is an easy way to make sure your message is used and shared widely.

You can find your Senators' and Representatives' Twitter handles on their websites, or at [twitter.com/cspan/lists/members-of-congress/members](https://twitter.com/cspan/lists/members-of-congress/members). See below for sample posts.

“.@REPNAME stand with #refugee communities - vote for H.R. 1568, 2798, and 2839!”

“#Refugees bring unique experiences, talents, and skills to our communities. @REPNAME, cosponsor H.R. 1568/2798/2839 to protect #refugees! #WelcomeWorld”

“The U.S. can do more to resettle and protect #refugees. Tell your Representative/Senator to vote for #refugee protection bills! #WelcomeWorld (link)”

“#Refugees are some of the most resilient people in our community. @REPNAME, vote for HR 2798 & help #refugees integrate in our communities!”

“.@REPNAME - help protect Syrian and Iraqi #refugees facing persecution. Cosponsor H.R. 1568!”

### **Sample Social Media Graphic**



## **Appendix A: Advocacy Staff Contact Information**

Please feel free to contact the following advocacy staff who represent organizations working with refugees:

- Church World Service: Jen Smyers, [jsmyers@cwsglobal.org](mailto:jsmyers@cwsglobal.org)
- Episcopal Migration Ministries: Lacy Broemel, [lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org](mailto:lbroemel@episcopalchurch.org)
- HIAS: Liz Mandelman: [elizabeth.mandelman@hias.org](mailto:elizabeth.mandelman@hias.org)
- International Rescue Committee: Anna Greene, [anna.greene@rescue.org](mailto:anna.greene@rescue.org)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: Brittney Nystrom, [bnystrom@lirs.org](mailto:bnystrom@lirs.org)
- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: Matt Wilch, [mwilch@usccb.org](mailto:mwilch@usccb.org)
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants: Esmeralda Lopez, [elopez@uscridc.org](mailto:elopez@uscridc.org)
- Ethiopian Community Development Council: Susan Kenney-Pfalzer, [SKPfalzer@ecdcus.org](mailto:SKPfalzer@ecdcus.org)
- World Relief: Jenny Yang, [jgyang@worldrelief.org](mailto:jgyang@worldrelief.org)
- Jesuit Refugee Service/USA: Giulia McPherson, [gmcpherson@jesuits.org](mailto:gmcpherson@jesuits.org)
- Refugee Council USA: Shaina Ward, [sward@rcusa.org](mailto:sward@rcusa.org)

# Refugee Council USA

September 9, 2015

President Barack Obama  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of U.S.-based organizations dedicated to refugee protection and welcome, I write to you today with urgent recommendations for how the United States should respond to the spiraling refugee crisis in the Middle East that is now overflowing to Europe and beyond. In addition, we respectfully request the opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss these recommendations in greater detail. Our recommendations are as follows:

1. In a letter that RCUSA sent to you on August 7, 2015, we asked that the United States increase its annual ceiling for refugee admissions from 70,000 to 100,000. In light of the continuing escalation of the refugee crises in the Middle East, contributing to the largest number of refugees since World War II, we now urge the United States to increase the number of refugees that we resettle to 200,000 for FY 16, with 100,000 of them being Syrian. This would not be the first time that the United States carries out our proud tradition of welcoming refugees in large numbers. After the end of the wars in Southeast Asia, the United States resettled 111,000 Vietnamese refugees in 1979 and then essentially doubled that number to 207,000 in 1980. The United States' rising to the occasion now would both encourage European nations to live up to their refugee protection obligations, and help to prevent further deterioration in the protection climate in the countries bordering on Syria that are currently hosting millions of Syrian refugees.

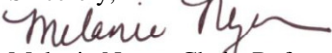
2. RCUSA believes that the vast majority of European countries have the capacity to welcome and provide protection for the refugees who are now risking their lives to find safety in Europe. However, the United States must show solidarity with its close allies in Europe and resettle a small number of refugees from Europe, including U.S. family reunification cases, unaccompanied refugee minors, and refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan who have close ties to the United States (NGO workers, interpreters, people affiliate with US business and other interests).

3. The United States has provided \$4 billion in funding to address the Syrian humanitarian crisis. We commend this tremendous generosity, but given that only 37% of the U.N's funding appeal in response to the crisis has been funded, we encourage the U.S. to continue to urge other countries to increase their funding of the humanitarian response while at the same time continuing to increase the amount that the U.S. gives.

4. It is abundantly clear that the Syrian crisis is nowhere close to ending, and even when it does, the needs of those displaced by the crisis will take years, if not generations, to resolve. It is therefore imperative that refugee hosting countries in the region allow refugees to start to work legally. Allowing them to do so will provide them with the opportunity to support their families, and in doing so, will help to alleviate the crushing poverty and desperation that are forcing so many to make the treacherous journeys to Europe. It is also imperative that the U.S. engage with major development actors to encourage the expansion of development plans to include refugee and refugee host communities in a further effort to address the extremely dire conditions in which millions are now living throughout the region. This effort could be supported by the convening of a major international conference where the U.S. could announce its plans to lead the response.

RCUSA members look forward to our continued work with our government partners to ensure that no refugee in need of protection is left behind. We will also continue to conduct outreach on these issues, including with press events, to help inform a broader audience about our recommendations. I thank you for your committed leadership on behalf of the world's most vulnerable.

Sincerely,



Melanie Nezer, Chair, Refugee Council USA

Cc: John Kerry, Secretary of State  
Anne Richard, Assistant Secretary of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM),  
Department of State

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## Members:

Asylum Access  
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Church World Service/  
Immigration & Refugee  
Program  
Episcopal Migration Ministries  
Ethiopian Community  
Development Council  
HIAS  
Human Rights First  
International Catholic  
Migration Commission  
International Rescue  
Committee  
Iraqi Refugee Assistance  
Project  
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA  
Jubilee Campaign USA  
Lutheran Immigration  
and Refugee Service  
ORAM – Organization for  
Refuge, Asylum & Migration  
RefugePoint  
Southeast Asia Resource  
Action Center  
U.S. Conference of Catholic  
Bishops/Migration & Refugee  
Services  
U.S. Committee for Refugees  
and Immigrants  
World Relief

# Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015

Sponsored by Representative Juan Vargas (CA -51)  
Co-Sponsored by Representative Tom Rooney (FL- 17)

## Issue

- The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is a transnational Sunni insurgency whose ideological and organizational roots lie in both al Qaeda in Iraq and the Syria-based Jabhat al Nursa. Formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, or ISIS), it has declared the establishment of a caliphate in areas under its control in both Iraq and Syria.
- On June 29, 2014, the caliphate was established and religious minorities in IS-held territories faced immediate persecution. These targeted acts included being forced from their homes, kidnapping civilians and seizing or demolishing churches and shrines, in a campaign of sectarian intimidation.
- Thousands of Christians fled Mosul and towns in the Nineveh Plains region for the safety of Kurdish-held areas. Yezidis, Shabaks, and Turkoman Shiites were also targeted and killed.
- In early August, the United States helped protect Yezidis who has been trapped on the Sinjar Mountain and were surrounded by armed Islamic State forces. This included dropping humanitarian aid and striking IS targets as they were advancing to the strategically important city of Erbil.

## Solution

Establish a process to provide humanitarian relief to those facing persecuting or have a credible fear of being persecuted by ISIL.

## Bill Summary

The *Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS* provides certain persecuted nationals or residents of Iraq or Syria Priority 2 processing to allow them to apply directly to the United States Admission Program. These persecuted groups will include religious and ethnic minorities and those facing gender-based violence. Priority 2 processing is for groups of special humanitarian concern identified by the U.S. refugee program, and the threshold for admission will be a well-founded fear of persecution and asserting a credible basis for that concern.

## Important Facts

Since January 2014, with the urgent humanitarian crisis that has unfolded in Iraq, an estimated 5.2 million people are in need of humanitarian and protection assistance. Of these, over 2.1 million people are Internally Displaced Persons, more than 1.7 million are in communities that are taking in the displaced (host communities), 1.5 million are in areas under the control of armed groups or impacted by the conflict, and 0.2 million are Syrian refugees.

## Contact Information

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Rep. Rooney: Jess Moore: (202) 225- 5792,  
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**THE DOMESTIC REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT REFORM AND  
MODERNIZATION ACT  
H.R. 1784 AND S. 883**

INTRODUCED IN THE 113<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS BY  
REPRESENTATIVES GARY C. PETERS (MI-14-R) AND STEVE STIVERS (OH-15-R)  
SENATORS DEBBIE STABENOW (D-MI), SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME) AND ANGUS  
KING (I-ME)

**Section 1:** Short title

**Section 2:** Findings

**Section 3:** Definitions

**Section 4:** Effective Date - this Act shall take effect on the date that is 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

**Section 5:** Directs GAO to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the domestic refugee resettlement program operated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement. The study will analyze issues pertaining to the definition of self sufficiency, the effectiveness of ORR in helping refugees to attain self-sufficiency, the unmet needs of the program, the role of community-based organizations, and statutory recommendations.

**Section 6:** Elevates the Office of Refugee Resettlement within HHS. The position of Director of ORR will elevate the position Assistant Secretary for Refugee and Asylee Resettlement. The Assistant Secretary shall be appointed by the President.

**Section 7:** Revises the formula for social services funding allocated to states to include projections of future refugee arrivals, as well as refugee data from prior years. Requires an annual report on secondary migration and its impact on states.

**Section 8:** Expands and improves data collection and reporting within ORR with regards to the mental health needs of refugees, housing needs, and long term employment and self-sufficiency data.

**Helping Refugees Integrate into the United States:  
The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act  
Representative Keith Ellison**

The United States has a long tradition of helping refugees fleeing persecution resettle into local communities. In 2014, the United States welcomed more than 69,987 refugees from countries around the world.

Unfortunately, even the most welcoming local communities are struggling to meet the needs of incoming refugees because of increasingly limited resources. Additionally, with the current economic situation, achieving self-sufficiency is increasingly difficult for refugees. The U.S. must recommit to ensuring that vulnerable individuals and families fleeing persecution and war can achieve self-sufficiency, and integrate and contribute to American communities and society.

The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act reforms both the pre-arrival processing of refugees for resettlement and the post-arrival resettlement program, with a goal of supporting refugees' integration into U.S. communities.

**1) Pre-Arrival Reforms:**

- Streamlines refugee processing abroad, while taking advantage of processing time to provide refugees with English classes and work orientation training.
- Encourages the appointment of a White House coordinator for federal agencies that works with refugees to coordinate and address refugee protection issues.
- Allows refugees to be admitted to the United States as lawful permanent residents, saving scarce government and NGO resources.

**2) Refugee Resettlement Reforms:**

- Strengthens grant programs to support refugee integration into local communities. In particular, this bill expands the public-private Matching Grant program, which has been highly successful in helping refugees become economically self-sufficient.
- Creates new grant programs to:
  - Help refugees integrate into their communities, including providing funds for housing, employment, and health care;
  - Provide case management programs to help refugees determine which services they are eligible for; and
  - Make available emergency resettlement resources to aid host communities needing additional help with new arrivals.
- Removes the expiration of supplemental security income benefits for the most vulnerable refugees.

The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act provides meaningful reforms and additional resources to continue the United States' tradition of welcoming people who have fled persecution in their own countries and providing them with the services they need to succeed in the United States.

To co-sponsor, please contact Abby Schanfield ([abby.schanfield@mail.house.gov](mailto:abby.schanfield@mail.house.gov)) with Representative Keith Ellison.