

Raise Your Voice:
Ask Your Member of Congress to Support the Refugee Resettlement Program and Welcome Refugees in Our Communities

Why a letter writing campaign?

- Members of Congress *want* to hear from their constituents. It is our job to let them know what issues we care about.
- Members of Congress are bombarded with asks all the time. They may not always know about pieces of legislation or actions that are taking place. We have a unique opportunity to bring these efforts to their attention.
- Even if our Member of Congress already supports the issues we care about, it is critical that we remind them that these issues are important to us.
- We should also thank our Member of Congress for being a supportive advocate and encourage them to keep up the good work.

What issues does this letter writing campaign address?

This campaign addresses two issues:

- i) This year's historically Presidential Determination of 18,000 (aka: the historically low number of refugees that will be allowed to resettle in the United States); and
- ii) The Executive Order signed by President Trump allowing states and municipalities to bar refugees from resettling in their communities.

What does that mean exactly?

- Every year, the President - after consulting with Congress - announces how many refugees will be allowed to resettle in the United States. This is known as the *Presidential Determination*.
- The Presidential Determination has averaged 95,000/year since the Refugee Assistance Program began in 1980. In President Obama's last year in office, the Presidential Determination was 110,000.
- President Trump has been steadily decreasing the Presidential Determination since he took office. This year's number – 18,000 – is the lowest number in the history of the program.
- On the same day that President Trump announced the Presidential Determination, he also signed an unprecedented Executive Order allowing states and municipalities to bar refugees from resettling in their communities. Essentially, Governors and Mayors can say to refugees: "*We don't want you here.*"

Okay, so I need to speak up. What should I write?

- Be clear. Describe the specific issue(s) you are addressing: i) the historically low number of refugees that can be resettled in the United States this year; and ii) the fact that states and municipalities can bar refugees from resettling in their communities.

- Speak from the heart. Why do *you* care about welcoming refugees to this country? Why is this an important issue for your community?
- Remind your elected official that the United States has a long, bipartisan history of supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Each year since 1980, on average, 95,000 refugees have been resettled in this country.
- Be specific in your ask – what do you want your elected official to do to address the problem? (See below).
- Remind your elected official that you support them and are here to stand up for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers *alongside* them.

Ask? What ask?

- Ask your Member of Congress to co-sponsor the GRACE Act, would which require that at least 95,000 refugees be resettled to the United States each year, keeping with historic norms; OR
- Thank your Member of Congress for being a co-sponsor of the GRACE Act and ask that they continue to raise their voice in support of refugees and refugee resettlement.

Is my Member of Congress a co-sponsor of the GRACE Act?

- Only 3 Members of Congress have signed on as co-sponsors (as of 10/5/2019): Congressman Casten, Congressman Quigley and Congresswoman Schakowsky

Sample letter:

Dear [Member of Congress],

I am writing today because I oppose the Trump administration's proposed refugee resettlement ceiling of 18,000 for fiscal year 2020, as well as the Executive Order allowing states and municipalities to bar refugees from resettling in their communities.

The United States has a long, bi-partisan history of supporting refugees. For generations, we have been beacon of hope and a refuge for individuals and families fleeing violence and persecution. In fact, since the refugee assistance program began in 1980, we have resettled an average of 95,000 refugees each year. Yet today, amidst the largest global refugee crisis in recorded history, we are turning our backs on the most vulnerable, proposing to admit the lowest number of refugees ever in the history of the resettlement program.

I would like the United States to reemerge as a leader on these issues and welcome those who are seeking safety and opportunities to rebuild their lives. This is of particular importance to me because _____.

[Name of elected official], please [insert ask]. Please [continue to] stand in support of refugees and the refugee resettlement program and ensure that refugees can continue to be resettled in this country.

Now more than ever, we must uphold refugees' rights to safety and dignity. [I/my congregation/my community] will continue to raise our voices and do what we can do help those in our community. [Insert specific example here]. I thank you for standing with us and ensuring that refugees are safe, supported and welcomed here.

[Your name]

[Name of congregation, school, etc., in Member of Congress' district]