



SUPPORT LEGISLATION TO PROTECT REFUGEES' HUMAN RIGHTS

INFLUENCING FEDERAL LEGISLATION

There are four priorities for national legislative action you can influence that UUSC believes are essential to protecting and advancing the rights of refugees in the United States. These include increasing the refugee quota, providing adequate funding for resettlement programs, supporting global humanitarian aid for refugees, and preventing discriminatory legislation. As of April 2016, over 9,000 of you have already taken action with us!

UUSC has four priorities for national legislative action related to refugees:

- 1. Increase the refugee quota.** President Obama has agreed to raise the number of refugees accepted to the United States from 70,000 per year to 85,000 in Fiscal Year 2016 and 100,000 in FY2017. This is an improvement but still too low, considering that Germany is resettling 800,000 refugees and has only a quarter of our population.
- 2. Provide adequate funding for resettlement programs.** The federal budget for FY2016 cuts funding for resettlement programs, even though the number of refugees arriving will be increasing. This will severely strain under-resourced resettlement agencies trying to meet the need.
- 3. Support global humanitarian aid for refugees.** The United Nations' Syrian Refugee Response Plan has only received 40% of the needed funding from its member states, and as a result food rations have been reduced. The United States can and should do more to fund global humanitarian efforts.
- 4. Prevent discriminatory legislation.** During the 2015-2016 legislative session, bills have been proposed that would create more hoops for refugees to jump through in the screening process, allow states to choose not to accept refugees, and institute religious discrimination by prioritizing Christian refugees over Muslims. We have taken a strong stand against these discriminatory bills.

Meet your Congress Member. Tell your Senators and Representative that you care about displaced people overseas and refugees resettled in the United States. It is time to act with historic leadership and compassion and stand with those seeking safety and the opportunity to build a new life. Urge your Senators and Representative to **welcome refugees into our communities, support increased funding for refugee assistance, processing, and resettlement, and oppose any attempt to dismantle the U.S. refugee resettlement system.**

HELPFUL HINTS FOR MEETING WITH YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

The best opportunity to meet with your members of Congress is during the times when they are in their local offices in your district. You may be inspired to meet with them regarding a specific bill, but it is equally important for them to know that there is consistent strong support for refugees in their district. Congressional visits are particularly effective if your representative is a member of an important committee that affects refugees, such as the Appropriations or Judiciary Committee.

As you plan your congressional visit, consider bringing together people representing different interests, backgrounds, faith identities, and constituencies to demonstrate to your legislators the breadth of support on this issue. Perhaps through the relationships your group has built with resettlement organizations and refugees who have become part of your local community, you will identify individuals whose first-hand experience of the resettlement process will help legislators get to know there are people living in their district who are affected by their policy decisions. It is important that our representatives understand that refugees aren't just an issue that matters to their constituents – refugees are their constituents. They live in their districts, they gain citizenship, and they vote. As always, be sensitive and make sure refugees only share what is safe and comfortable for them. When addressing the impact of U.S. foreign policy and military interventions on the displacement of refugees, another important stakeholder group to include may be local veterans who are advocates for peace, diplomacy and human rights. Local chapters of Veterans for Peace and Iraq Veterans Against the War may serve as helpful resources, as both are concerned with the human toll of U.S. wars.

Another way for your legislators to get a better understanding of the direct impacts of the current refugee crisis is to encourage them to travel on a delegation to visit refugee camps or the places from which refugees are currently traveling. Several members of Congress have reported that this has been a deeply moving experience, one that has influenced their understanding of and commitment to this issue.

Tips on What to Say

"I'm a constituent from [City/State] and I urge the [Senator/Representative] to welcome refugees into our communities, support increased funding for refugee assistance, processing, and resettlement, and oppose any attempt to dismantle the U.S. refugee resettlement system. The U.S. government and communities around the country help to ensure that people fleeing life-threatening situations find protection. The United States must demonstrate leadership and increase refugee resettlement. Efforts to stop, pause, or disrupt the U.S. refugee resettlement system do not reflect our national values of generosity, humanity, resilience and solidarity."

A detailed resource on how to conduct local congressional visits on refugee issues is available from Refugee Council USA here: rcusa.org/uploads/pdfs/members/Local%20Congressional%20Visit%20Advocacy%20Toolkit_09.16.15.pdf



CONGREGATIONS IN ACTION IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

We formed Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice in the Nation's Capital Region because as people of faith, we are called to remind our decision makers about the worth and dignity of every person, regardless of parentage or nationality, as the United States decides how to respond to immigrants arriving from around the world, especially from Central America and the Middle East. There are more than 6,500 Unitarian Universalists in over 23 congregations in the greater Washington, D.C., National Capital Region, and 5,670 in Virginia, and we know that together, our voice can be powerful. After the House of Representatives passed HR 4038 (the so-called SAFE Act), which sought to add new hurdles for Middle Eastern refugees' ability to enter the United States, we lobbied our senators to stop the passage of that bill. We believed that the bill was a terrible response to the fears in this country generated by the terror attacks in Paris and San Bernardino. We felt that responding to fear in that way is contrary to the principles that motivate us to help ease the path for immigrants and refugees, and would provide absolutely no additional security for people in the United States. Over a period of more than two months, we met with the staff of Rep. Gerald Connolly (D-VA), and Senators Timothy Kaine (D-VA), Mark Warner (D-VA), and Ben Cardin (D-MD). We are pleased to share that a few hours after our final visit on January 20, 2016, the Senate refused to consider HR 4038 and it therefore will not reach the President's desk. While this victory is important, we know it is only a first step.

-Lavona Grow, Board Chair, Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice in the Nation's Capital Region

STOPPING STATE-LEVEL ANTI-REFUGEE LEGISLATION

As of April 2016, 13 states have 46 anti-refugee bills pending in their legislatures: Florida, Arizona, South Carolina, Kansas, Mississippi, Nebraska, Tennessee, Missouri, Wyoming, Virginia, New York, Minnesota, and Alabama.

Contact UUSC at mobilization@uusuc.org if you live in a state considering anti-refugee legislation and would like to organize with us against it. Almost every state has a strong coalition to prevent these bills from becoming law, and we can help you connect.

Proposed state laws include injustices like:

- Requiring resettlement agencies to pay the costs of crimes committed by refugees (Neb., S.C., Ariz.)
- Registering all refugees into a database for their activities to be monitored (N.Y., S.C.)
- Authorizing the use of military force to keep refugees out (Fla.)
- Implementing "absorptive capacity acts" allowing cities and states to ban new refugees on the grounds that they don't have the capacity to handle the increase in population (Kan., Miss., S.C., S.D.)

Additionally, 31 Governors have made public statements that they do not want Syrian refugees resettling in their state.

Neither states nor cities have the legal authority to exclude Syrian or other refugees, because refugee resettlement is under federal jurisdiction. However, these bills – whether they pass or not – have real impact. They create a chilling, unfriendly environment for new Americans, and can provide inspiration for hate crimes.

Further state-by-state information can be found on the Interfaith Immigration Coalition website, interfaithimmigration.org/2015/12/03/welcoming-refugees-state-by-state-resources/. For weekly updates on state-level legislation related to refugees, sign up at stateresponsealerts@gmail.com.

CREATING REFUGEE-WELCOMING CITIES AND COUNTIES

While we learn almost daily about new anti-immigrant developments, nine cities and 10 counties have passed resolutions affirming their identities as "welcoming and inclusive communities" ready to accept Syrian and Muslim refugees. Mayors from 62 of the largest cities in the United States have signed a letter to Congress pledging their support for resettling refugees, many in opposition to their own states' public stance. Additionally, 340 cities are already declared "Sanctuary Cities" where law enforcement will not cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to identify and deport undocumented community members.

HINTS FOR PASSING A RESOLUTION TO WELCOME REFUGEES WITH YOUR CITY OR COUNTY:

1. **Research your city/county:** Assess the political make-up of your City Council or County Commission and determine if a resolution will be likely to have enough support. If your city is already a Sanctuary City (see this map here cis.org/sites/cis.org/files/Sanctuary-Cities-Map-Full-Screen.html), it is likely a strong target for a refugee welcoming resolution. If your city would be a good target and you are in a state whose governor has spoken against refugees or whose legislator will be voting on anti-refugee legislation, these resolutions are especially important.
2. **Develop a coalition:** Identify who else in the community would be interested in passing a resolution, and invite them to create an ad hoc coalition. This might include other faith communities, university student groups, and resettlement agencies. Many localities have long-standing ecumenical or interfaith coalitions and human rights councils. These are good places to begin the conversations.
3. **Find a City Council member to sponsor the resolution:** Set up meetings with individual members of the council/commission or their staff and find one of them who is a strong ally and would like to introduce the resolution.
4. **Mobilize support for the resolution:** Get as many supporters as possible to show up at the council/commission meeting for the vote and speak in support at the meeting. Collect online petition signatures. Pursue media coverage – unless you think it will bring out more people in opposition, in which case keeping it quieter could work in your favor.

A sample proposal for a City Council resolution is available in the Resources section of this toolkit. Our sample resolution is unique from those that have been passed because we include text actively welcoming refugees from Syria, Central America, and other regions of the world. The sample is intended to be adapted to your city.

