

November 10, 2016

Dear Governor Abbott,

We write as leaders in national and local faith communities, and as faith-based organizations, to express our deep disappointment in your announcement that the Texas state government will withdraw from the U.S. refugee resettlement program, effective January 31, 2017. As faith partners, we are grateful there are more than 22 refugee resettlement offices in Texas. Most of these offices have specific faith roots, and all work consistently with multi-faith partners to ensure effective resettlement and integration into Texas communities. It is through these offices that our faith communities are energized and engage in welcoming refugees by offering refugee hospitality kits, furniture for refugee households, emergency assistance for critical needs, building friendships, and hosting mentoring and welcome events, all of which are so essential for effective integration of refugees. We have been pleased to serve as community partners in assisting Texas in its resettlement of thousands of refugees from all over the world.

We take seriously our deep call to “welcome the stranger” and to show compassion for vulnerable populations facing persecution. As diverse faith communities, we have been proud to assist together in the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of refugees around the U.S. since the end of World War II. Our refugee neighbors have demonstrated values of resilience, determination, and hope. These are strong faith values, and they are also some of our strongest American values. Our relationships with refugee families have enriched our congregational communities, and have helped our members understand and provide healing in the face of many of the deepest conflicts around the world.

We are aware that your state plan announced on September 21st would have required our nation's top national security officials to personally certify that each and every refugee does not pose a security threat to Texas. Therefore, we wish to express to you our strong confidence in the safety of the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Indeed, as numerous security officials can attest, our nation's refugee resettlement program is the most secure refugee program in the world, and refugees who enter into the United States through it are the most securely vetted of ALL entrants into the country.

Through an 18-24 month process, refugees have been screened for bio-data, scanned for bio-metric information, and made subject to multiple personal security interviews designed to ensure consistency in stories and to document they meet the persecution requirements of one who receives the legal status of refugee. Additionally, DHS and USCIS conduct robust additional security checks of refugees, and recurrent scrutiny throughout the lengthy refugee process ensures refugees are not included in terrorist databases. Such processes are highly secure —and have been made even more secure as technology has advanced in the past few years.

Throughout our nation's history, the public-private partnership of refugee resettlement in the U.S. has served as an international model for welcoming and an effective way for the vulnerable to find new hope. Additionally, it has helped the comfortable demonstrate welcome across boundaries and practice the virtue of hospitality. We can be both safe and welcoming of refugees. Indeed, in this time when one in every 113 people globally is an asylum seeker, internally displaced, or is a refugee, and where there are more refugees in the world than at any time in recorded history, we must re-double — not turn back from — our life-giving heritage of refugee resettlement.

Therefore, for the above reasons, we call upon you to re-commit your support for and participation in the U.S. resettlement program. We will continue to assist with resettlement through newly emerging structures within Texas. Yet, we urgently request you reconsider your recently announced decision, and return the state to its full participation in the federal refugee resettlement program.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. John McCullough, President & CEO, Church World Service

Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins, General Minister & President, Disciples of Christ

Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister & President, United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

Rev. Dr. Ronald Degges, President, Disciples Home Missions, Disciples of Christ

Rev. Julia Brown Karimu, President, Overseas Ministries & Co-Executive, Global Ministries, Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. John Moos, Global Ministries, Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries & Co-Executive Global Ministries, Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ

Rev. Vy Nguyen, Executive Director, Week of Compassion, Disciples of Christ

Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Disciples of Christ

Rev. Coretha Loughridge, Interim Regional Minister & President for the SW Region, Texas, Disciples of Christ