

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley,
Governor of South Carolina
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

Hello, my name is Jonathan Sanchez and I am a resident of Columbia, SC. I am currently a student at Yale Divinity School studying in preparation for ordained ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I am writing in order to express my dismay at the request you sent to State Department, where you asked that the federal government not send any Syrian refugees to South Carolina.

I understand the desire to keep South Carolinians safe. You have an enormous responsibility and I am thankful that you do not take that lightly. However I do not think that accepting Syrian refugees poses a significant threat to the safety of South Carolinians. The system for screening refugees takes years and there are multiple steps where refugee applicants are vetted by various agencies including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Resettlement Support Center, and Department of Homeland Security. While no system is perfect, I believe that numerous interviews and security screenings of this system sufficiently addresses safety concerns.

Regardless, I urge you as a fellow Christian to reconsider your decision and to allow refugees to settle in South Carolina. I am strongly convinced that this is part of our Christian mandate. Deuteronomy 10:19 commands the Israelite people to "love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Israel." This concern is echoed in other places throughout the Torah and in the Prophets. And Christ commands us to uphold the Law, seen in Matthew 5:17-20. Furthermore in Matthew 25 Jesus warns of failing to care for "the least of these." By failing to accept these refugees we fail to live up to our calling as Christians.

We must heed our past. Seventy-six years ago, a ship called the St. Louis carrying over nine hundred Jewish refugees was turned away from the coast of Florida. Four other countries took the refugees; three of these countries fell to Germany and two hundred fifty-four of those that the United States turned away died in the Holocaust. If we do not accept the Syrian refugees, we take on responsibility for any harm that comes to them. By turning them away we fail our Christian mandate.

I believe that South Carolina is better than this. Accepting refugees may not be the popular thing to do. But Christ calls us to do the right thing, not the popular one. He calls us to follow Him and to care for and love our neighbor. He never promises that it will be safe or easy. But Christ promises that He will be with us, even until the end of the age. And so I urge you to reconsider your decision and to instead welcome as many refugees as the federal government will send us. Let South Carolina be a trendsetter among Republicans and in the South, where we live out what it means to show Christ's love.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan M. Sanchez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Jonathan M. Sanchez

