

December 2, 2015

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

Dear Governor Haley,

We, the undersigned national refugee resettlement organizations, are deeply committed to welcoming and serving refugees who come to our country after passing through the U.S. government's thorough security screening process. We see today's refugees as assets to our communities and nation – just as our own ancestors were. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is emblematic of American values – protection of the most vulnerable, freedom, and fairness. As a public-private partnership, we invest alongside the federal government to: ensure that refugees are supported as they begin their new life in America; launch their journey of being integrated in to the U.S.; and engage receiving communities in welcoming newcomers.

Each of our resettlement organizations has a Cooperative Agreement with the federal government to responsibly resettle refugees across numerous established sites in the country and we will continue to honor the terms of that agreement. Accordingly, each of our organizations will continue to resettle refugees in the United States in accordance with this agreement and existing federal law. All cases will be handled with professionalism, compassion and in the same manner in which they have been handled in the past, and in accordance with established guidelines, which include regular consultations with state and local stakeholders.

Our refugee Reception and Placement (R&P) Cooperative Agreements with the U.S. Department of State require that resettlement organizations conduct placement planning, reception, and basic needs and core service activities in close cooperation and coordination with state and local governments. This includes sharing information on arriving refugees for the purposes of coordinating services. Local resettlement affiliates also conduct quarterly consultations with stakeholders, including the State Refugee Coordinator, during which they provide statistics on year-to-date arrivals, projections, and information on the characteristics of arriving refugee populations including nationality, ethnicity, average family size and composition, language and education background, and medical conditions. In addition, State Refugee Coordinators receive quarterly Caseload reports from the Department of State, as well as a monthly arrivals report. Such information sharing regarding overall characteristics of incoming refugees is indeed needed to coordinate services and ensure successful resettlement.

Information regarding individual refugee cases is considered confidential. Requests for specific refugee case information outside of the normal process for provision of services should be sent directly to the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). We have been advised that, in order to release refugee information, PRM will need to receive an official letter from the requesting entity's headquarters or a local or state official's office, on letterhead, stating the specific purpose of the request. The request may be addressed to Lawrence Bartlett, Director of the Office of Admissions and sent to PRM-Admissions-Inquiries@state.gov. PRM will then assess how to respond to the request.

In states where governors have expressed a desire to halt Syrian resettlement, there are many mayors and city/county level government officials that remain supportive of welcoming Syrian refugees in their communities. The generosity of citizens, private charitable organizations, corporate and foundation donors, community groups, congregations, and vast volunteer networks that exist in all of the communities around the country where we work have always contributed to the successful resettlement and integration of refugees. We will continue to ensure that refugees are treated fairly, that their rights are protected, that they experience America as a nation of welcome, and that they receive the services to which they are entitled – no matter the funding source.

Lastly, as refugees are U.S. residents admitted under federal immigration law, they are eligible for federal services administered at the state and local level. It is our understanding that withholding services to individuals lawfully residing in the United States on the basis of their religion or country of origin is discriminatory and our continuing obligation to comply with federal law remains.

We pledge our continued commitment to work with the highest levels of state leadership in all areas where refugees are resettled, and strive to have an open dialogue through the consultation processes already in place.

We would be happy to meet with you at your convenience to discuss these matters and can be reached through Shaina Ward, Associate Director of Refugee Council USA, at sward@rcusa.org and 202-319-2102.

Sincerely,

Church World Service/Immigration and Refugee Program
Ethiopian Community Development Council
HIAS
International Rescue Committee
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
World Relief