

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 30, 2018

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We are deeply troubled by reports that your Administration is considering a third reduction in as many years in the number of refugees who may be resettled in the United States.¹ We write to express our strong support for refugees and to urge your Administration to fulfill our nation's long-standing bipartisan commitment to providing protection and refuge to the world's most vulnerable populations.

At a time when 44,000 people per day are forced to flee their homes due to violence and persecution,² the United States should be stepping up its global leadership and demonstrating America's compassion—rather than shirking our legacy as a nation of immigrants and a beacon of hope for those fleeing persecution. We therefore ask that you intensify efforts to meet the current refugee resettlement ceiling for fiscal year 2018 and increase the number of refugees who may be resettled in the upcoming fiscal year.

In the Refugee Act of 1980, Congress granted the president authority, in consultation with Congress, to determine a ceiling for refugee admissions to the United States each year. At the time the world was facing one of the largest refugee crises, with millions of people from Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, and countries in the Horn of Africa displaced. President Reagan, who vowed to “continue America's tradition as a land that welcomes peoples from other countries [and] continue to share in the responsibility of welcoming and resettling those who flee oppression,”³ set the cap at 140,000 in fiscal year 1982,⁴ and the United States admitted more than 98,000 refugees that fiscal year.⁵

¹ *The New York Times*, “White House Weighs Another Reduction in Refugees Admitted to U.S.” (Aug. 1, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/01/us/politics/trump-refugees-reduction.html>

² U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, “Figures at a Glance” (June 19, 2018), <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>

³ *The Economist*, “How America's Refugee Policy is Damaging to the World and to Itself” (June 19, 2018),

<https://www.economist.com/open-future/2018/06/19/how-americas-refugee-policy-is-damaging-to-the-world-and-to-itself>

⁴ Migration Policy Institute, “U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present” (2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united>

⁵ U.S. Department of State, “Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System” (2018), <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>

In fiscal year 2016, showing global leadership, the United States admitted 84,994.⁶ While President Obama set the refugee ceiling for fiscal year 2017 at 110,000 in response to the scale of the global refugee crisis,⁷ once you took office you slashed the cap to 50,000, which was quickly met by July.⁸ In October, we were disappointed when you set the ceiling for fiscal year 2018 even lower at 45,000⁹—the lowest since the ceiling was established in 1980.

Moreover, reports indicate “the Trump administration has used bureaucratic delays to slow the number of refugees to a trickle,” including by slashing the staff who conduct interviews.¹⁰ Based on current rates of resettlement your Administration is on pace to admit approximately 21,000 refugees to the United States during this fiscal year¹¹—which would be the lowest number of refugees admitted to the United States since the program was created.¹² We encourage you, as someone who prides himself on his management acumen, to push all relevant federal agencies to expedite refugee processing to meet the 45,000 ceiling by October 1.

Since our nation’s founding, refugees have brought immense value, diversity, and perseverance to the American character. These characteristics have made our country stronger and more resilient. Reports show that refugees are highly entrepreneurial—creating jobs for United States citizens—and generating billions of dollars in economic growth for the United States.¹³ Refugees’ labor force participation, employment rates, median income, spending power, and rates of college graduation are robust.¹⁴ Not only is the United States’ refugee program a moral imperative, but it also is an economic boon to our country.

Among all travelers to the United States, refugees are the most carefully and thoroughly vetted.¹⁵ Prior to traveling, refugees must clear extensive biometric, biographic, intelligence, medical, and law enforcement checks, involving multiple agencies and extensive interviews.¹⁶ While we must continue to screen refugee applicants thoroughly, we must also conduct the vetting and interviews in a timelier manner and address the root causes of mass displacement abroad.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ U.S. Department of State, “Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2017: Report to the Congress” (Sept. 15, 2016), <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/262168.pdf>

⁸ *National Public Radio*, “U.S. Refugee Admissions Pass Trump Administration Cap Of 50,000” (July 12, 2017), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/07/12/536899605/u-s-refugee-admissions-pass-trump-administration-cap-of-50-000>

⁹ U.S. Department of State, “Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2018: Report to the Congress” (Oct. 4, 2017), <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/274613.htm>

¹⁰ *The New York Times*, “Apartments Are Stocked, Toys Donated. Only the Refugees Are Missing” (May 16, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/us/refugee-admissions.html>

¹¹ International Rescue Committee, “IRC: Trump Administration on Track to Miss Own Target for Refugee Admissions” (2018), <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-trump-administration-track-miss-own-target-refugee-admissions>

¹² Migration Policy Institute, “U.S. Annual Refugee Resettlement Ceilings and Number of Refugees Admitted, 1980-Present” (2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/us-annual-refugee-resettlement-ceilings-and-number-refugees-admitted-united>

¹³ New American Economy, “From Struggle to Resilience: The Economic Impact of Refugees in America” (June 2017), http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/NAE_Refugees_V6.pdf

¹⁴ *Id.*

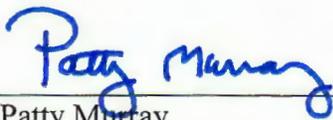
¹⁵ *The Washington Post*, “Refugees Are already vigorously vetted” (Feb. 1, 2017), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2017/02/01/refugees-are-already-vigorously-vetted-i-know-because-i-vetted-them/?noredirect=on>

¹⁶ The White House, “Infographic: The Screening Process for Refugee Entry into the United States” (Nov. 20, 2015), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>

The refugee program Congress established in 1980 solidified our great nation's moral leadership as a beacon of hope and place of refuge for those being persecuted. Moreover, it also served a strategic national security goal.¹⁷ As former Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff wrote, "cutting refugee admittances would not only be a moral failure but also damage our national interest abroad [...] Maintaining resettlement commitments is also critical to our military, diplomatic and intelligence operations abroad."¹⁸ Further, as Michael Hayden, former Director of the National Security Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency, and James Stavridis, former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, explain, "hostility to refugees helps ISIS. [...] Conversely, welcoming refugees regardless of their religion, nationality, or race exposes the falseness of terrorist propaganda and counters the warped vision of extremists."¹⁹ National security experts agree on a bipartisan basis that a robust refugee program is vital for our national security, and we are deeply concerned that your actions to reduce refugee resettlement in the past two fiscal years has damaged our military, diplomatic, and intelligence interests abroad. The United States should not fear the world's most vulnerable, nor should we scapegoat victims of terror and repression who seek refuge in the United States.

We ask that you take steps to ensure the number of refugee admissions in fiscal year 2018 is 45,000, consistent with the current ceiling. We further ask that you provide a significant increase above fiscal year 2018 to the total number of refugees who may be admitted to the United States in fiscal year 2019. If you have any questions about this issue, please contact Jake Cornett of Senator Murray's staff at 202-224-0767.

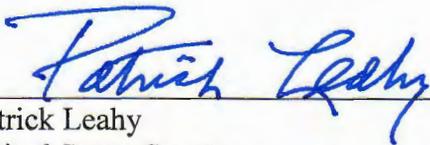
Sincerely,



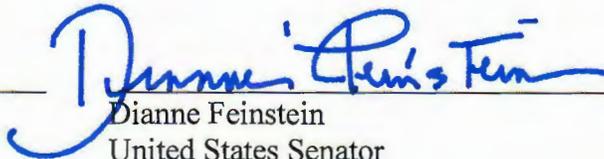
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

¹⁷ National Security Experts, "Letter to Congress" (Dec. 1, 2015), <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/FormerNatSecOfficialsLetterRefugees.pdf>; "Statement of Principles on America's Commitment to Refugees" (N.D.) <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/STATEMENT-ON-AMERICAS-COMMITMENT-TO-REFUGEES.pdf>

¹⁸ *The Washington Post*, "Cutting refugee admissions hurts Americans. Here's how" (Sept. 14, 2017) https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/cutting-refugee-admissions-hurts-americans-heres-how/2017/09/14/c7c8b5e6-9987-11e7-b569-3360011663b4_story.html?utm_term=.eb6a25631d0e

¹⁹ *Miami Herald*, "U.S. Must Lead on Refugee Crisis" (July 8, 2016), <https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article88582362.html>



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator



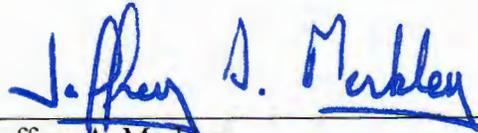
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



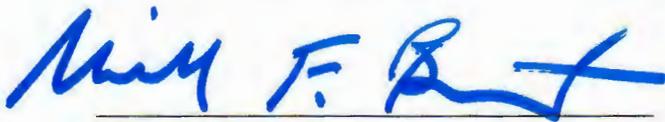
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



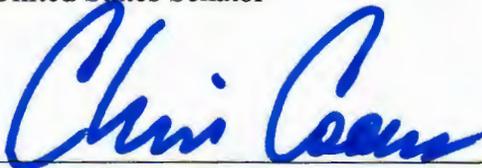
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



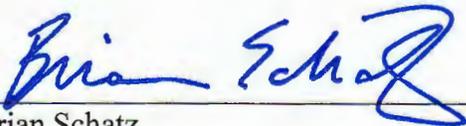
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



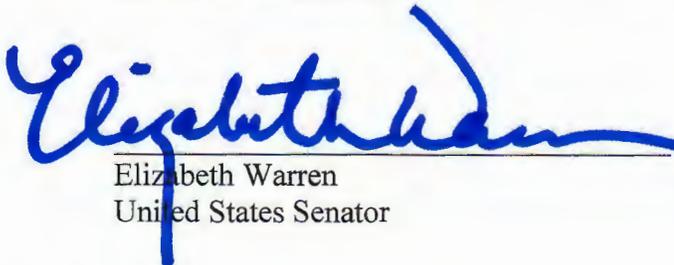
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



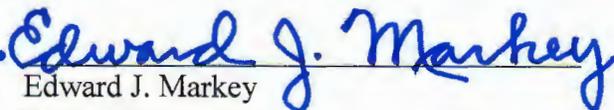
Brian Schatz
United States Senator



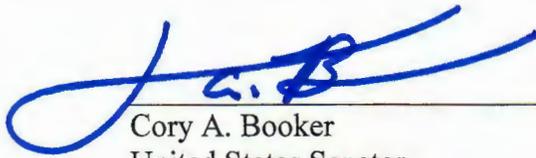
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



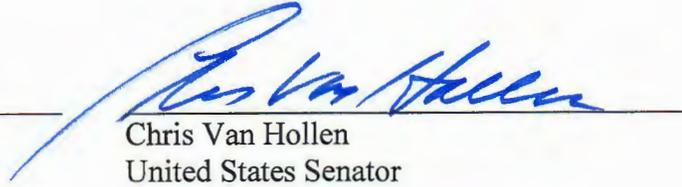
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



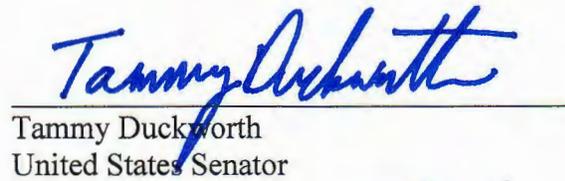
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



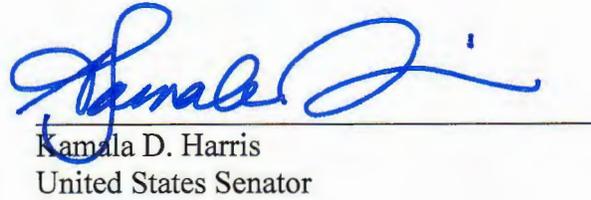
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



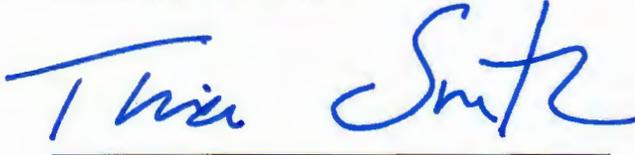
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State, U.S. Department of State, 2201 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable James N. Mattis, Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, 1300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen, Secretary of Homeland Security, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 301 7th Street, SW, Mail Stop 0150, Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable John Bolton, National Security Advisor, Eisenhower Executive Office Building, Room 307, 1650 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20503