

Submitted to the Committee on the Judiciary of the U.S. House of Representatives
Hearing on June 14, 2017
H.R. 2826, (Refugee Program Integrity Restoration Act of 2017)

Dear Chairman Goodlatte and Ranking Member Conyers:

The undersigned 117 organizations strongly oppose H.R. 2826, the “Refugee Program Integrity Restoration Act of 2017,” as introduced, including the amendment in the nature of substitute. This proposed legislation would dismantle the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which has been a critical humanitarian and diplomacy tool for over three decades. With more than 65 million forcibly displaced people around the world, including well over 21.3 million registered refugees, it is critically important that the U.S. continue to demonstrate global leadership by offering protection and welcome to refugees, regardless of their country of origin, vulnerability, or religion. Our country was founded and built by refugees and immigrants, seeking safety, welcome, and freedom from tyranny and oppression. Were it to be enacted, this legislation would send the message that refugees are no longer welcome on our shores. For these reasons, we urge the Committee to reject this legislation.

This Act would threaten our national security and undermine humanitarian assistance. It proposes to cap the number of refugees resettled in the U.S. at 50,000 per year, despite strong bipartisan support from both Congress and previous presidents who regularly determined that far larger numbers should be admitted. Reducing refugee admissions during the world’s worst refugee crisis sends the message to countries hosting large numbers of refugees that countries can abdicate their global responsibility sharing in this crisis, leaving refugees in danger. It further threatens national security partners, like Jordan, who are facing enormous infrastructure challenges under the strain of hosting too many refugees. By not taking our fair share of refugees, the U.S. threatens its own national security. Importantly, it would remove presidential authority to set the number of refugees who may enter the country per year.

H.R. 2826 would require the U.S. to prioritize resettlement of religious minorities above all other refugees, including those who fear persecution based on their race, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. It also undermines the integrity of the program, which currently resettles refugees based on vulnerability rather than a hierarchy of human rights. Prioritization of religious minorities would threaten the vital relationships with Muslim allies our military and diplomats depend upon to carry out military and counterterrorism operations. Host countries could deny exit to Christian minority refugees because of the highly discriminatory anti-Muslim refugee policy. Furthermore, this legislation provides the Islamic State with a propaganda tool to claim the United States is at war with Islam.

Previously, Congress passed the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act, to make sure that Iraqis who were in danger due to their ties to the United States could be brought to safety through the U.S. resettlement program. More than 50,000 Iraqis are awaiting completion of their processing through this program designed to protect those targeted due to their service for the United States. H.R. 2826’s reduction in annual admissions and the prioritization of religious minorities would directly undermine this program and cause a chilling ripple effect on Iraqi Muslims who currently provide vital support to the U.S. Government and military in the fight against the Islamic State.

This Act would allow state and local governments to “veto” refugee resettlement in their communities, opening the door for discrimination against refugees; it is also potentially an unconstitutional delegation of federal power, which could create a patchwork of refugee policies across the country. This outcome would be detrimental both to refugees’ successful integration and to communities receiving them.

H.R. 2826 would further allow refugees to be placed under continual surveillance after their arrival, which would codify discrimination against refugees and raise serious privacy concerns. The current vetting process for refugees is incredibly rigorous and includes biographic and biometric screening by U.S. federal law enforcement and national security agencies. It is simply un-American to treat persecuted individuals, who want nothing more than to start a new life in safe and welcoming communities, as criminals.

The Refugee Program Integrity Restoration Act would automatically revoke the refugee status of any refugee who returns to their country of origin. This short-sighted policy fails to take account of the many situations that refugees may encounter, such as being forced to risk their lives to return home to see a dying or sick loved one for the last time. These individuals, who have endured such trauma and still risk their own safety to care for loved ones, should not be in fear of having their protection revoked due to traveling home. These circumstances must be considered individually rather than requiring an automatic termination, as this could lead to violations of U.S. and international law and result in returning an individual to persecution.

Furthermore, H.R. 2826 creates unnecessary and expensive burdens on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The legislation would require an interview with DHS before a refugee can adjust to lawful permanent residency in the U.S. and would require refugees to provide evidence that they still meet the refugee definition at the time of adjustment. DHS already has the authority to require such an interview when it determines one is needed. The time and money required to implement these changes could be spent more responsibly and strategically.

Not to mention the undue hardship imposed on refugees by H.R. 2826 that delays the ability to adjust to lawful permanent resident status from one year, as is the case under current law, to three years. This would be extremely counterproductive to refugee integration, employment, and self-sufficiency.

The Act imposes further additional costs for DHS by implementing redundant anti-fraud measures. More importantly, these measures would cause life-threatening delays in the resettlement process for refugee applicants. The U.S. refugee program already has abundant security measures - approved by national security agencies - to safeguard our nation's security.

Finally, and most importantly, if this Act were to become law, it would send a message that refugees - who have survived years of persecution and trauma, and who are already woven into the fabric of U.S. communities - are not welcome here. We stand ready to work with the Committee to create policies that will continue to improve the world class refugee resettlement program we have built, in partnership with the Federal government and communities across the country, over many decades. We oppose H.R. 2826 so that we may continue our country's proud tradition of protecting and welcoming vulnerable and persecuted people from around the world.

Thank you for your consideration to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Ahlul Bayt Student Association (Rutgers University)
Alliance for Global Justice
Alliance for Multicultural Community Services (Texas)
Amnesty International USA
Anti-Defamation League

Asian Americans Advancing Justice – AAJC
Business Center for New Americans (New York)
Canopy of Northwest Arkansas
Catholic Charities Archdiocese of San Antonio, Inc.
Central Christian Church (Arizona)
Chinese Community Center (Texas)
Christian Community Development Association
Church World Service
Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester (New York)
Congregation Shomrei Emunah Refugee Assistance Group (New Jersey)
Crestview United Methodist Church (Texas)
Culture Kids International (Minnesota)
Dallas Peace and Justice Center (Texas)
Denver Justice and Peace Committee (Colorado)
Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
First Presbyterian Church, Fort Worth, TX
For the City (Texas)
Franciscan Action Network
Franciscan Peace Center (Iowa)
Franciscans for Justice
Freewheels Houston -- Bikes for Refugees (Texas)
Wesminster Presbyterian Church, Santa Fe, New Mexico
Gethsemane Lutheran Church (Washington)
Grace United Church of Christ
Greater New York Labor Religion Coalition (New York)
Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services, Inc. (Florida)
Heart House (Texas)
HIAS
Hill Country Hill Tribers (Texas)
Hmong American Center (Texas)
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church Refugee Resettlement (Washington)
Houston Peace and Justice Center (Texas)
Houston Welcomes Refugees (Texas)
Human Rights First
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
IEDA Relief (Texas)
Immigration Task Force of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Santa Fe NM
Indivisible TXJC (Texas)
Interfaith Action of Central Texas
International Refugee Assistance Project
International Refugee Committee of Dallas (Texas)
International Rescue Committee
Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles (California)

Jewish Family Service of San Diego (California)
Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley (California)
Just Foreign Policy
Kean University Human Rights Institute (New Jersey)
Keep Phoenix Beautiful Inc. (Arizona)
Leadership Team of the Felician Sisters of North America
Lutheran Community Services NW (Washington)
Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains Refugee & Asylee Programs (New Mexico)
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Lutheran Services Carolinas (South Carolina)
Lutheran Services Florida-Orlando
Lutheran Social Services of NE Florida
Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees (New York)
Mosaic Family Services (Texas)
Multicultural Refugee Coalition (Texas)
Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees
Muslim Volunteer Network (New York)
NAFSA: Association of International Educators
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Immigration Forum
Non Profit Solutions
North Carolina African Services Coalition
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
Open Arms (Texas)
Organization of Bhutanese Society DFW (Texas)
Partners for Refugee Empowerment (Texas)
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee (Oregon)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Reform Ride for Refugees (Washington)
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)
Refugee and Immigrant Center-AAU (Utah)
Refugee and Immigrant Center-Asian Association of Utah
Refugee Congress
Refugee Services of Texas
RefugeeOne (Illinois)
Wesminster Presbyterian Church, Santa Fe, New Mexico
Royal Lane Baptist Church (Texas)
Samaritas (Michigan)
Santa Fe Monthly Meeting of Friends (New Mexico)
Seek the Peace (Texas)
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Sisters of Saint Francis JPICC (Colorado)
Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities
Social Justice Team (New Mexico)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
St John's United Methodist Church (Texas)
St. John's Episcopal Church Refugee Ministry (Texas)
St. Luke's on the Lake Episcopal Church (Texas)
STAND: The Student-Led Movement to End Mass Atrocities
Temple Emanu-El (Texas)
The Center for Victims of Torture
The Episcopal Church
The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Washington)
The Select Center for Economic Opportunity (Texas)
The Welcome to America Project (Arizona)
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Church of Santa Fe (New Mexico)
University Place Presbyterian Church (Washington)
US Together (Ohio)
Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation (Texas)
Westminster Economic Development Initiative (New York)
Westminster Presbyterian Church Missions Committee (New Mexico)
Wildflower Unitarian Universalist Church (Texas)
Women's Economic Self-Sufficiency Team Corp (New Mexico)
YMCA International Services (Texas)