

Governor Ron DeSantis
Office of the Governor
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399

December 9, 2019

Dear Governor DeSantis,

As evangelical Christians from throughout the state of Florida, we're writing to urge you to allow refugees to continue to be resettled to Florida through the U.S. refugee admissions program. Under an executive order signed by President Trump in September, resettlement will happen only in states and localities whose leaders provide written consent to allow refugees to be resettled in the state/locality. Florida evangelical churches and ministries have been active in serving newly arrived refugees for decades, and we pray you will not restrict the ability for us to love our global neighbors in this way.

Over the past decade, roughly 24,900 individuals from various countries have been resettled in Florida. Many refugees resettled by the U.S. refugee resettlement program are Christians or other religious minorities who were persecuted for their faith in countries without our country's constitutional commitment to religious freedom. Others were persecuted for their political opposition to authoritarian regimes or because of their ethnicity. Regardless of their background, refugees are human beings made in God's image, with inherent dignity and potential, and we have been blessed by their arrival in Florida; we desire to continue to be able to extend love to these new neighbors as an exercise of our Christian faith.

Refugees resettled by the U.S. State Department are lawfully present in the U.S. from the moment of their arrival. Each one undergoes a thorough vetting process abroad before being approved for resettlement; in fact, the vetting process for refugees is the most thorough screening our federal government has for any category of immigrant or visitor coming to the U.S.. The vetting process is remarkably successful: since the Refugee Act of 1980, no refugee resettled to the U.S. has taken a single American life in an act of terrorism. We can be secure and compassionate in welcoming refugees.

Refugees also play an important role in Florida's economy. With a remarkably low statewide unemployment rate of just 3.3%, labor shortages pose a significant threat to ongoing economic growth. Refugees are employment authorized from the day they arrive and are eager to embrace the dignity of work, a right that was generally denied them in the countries from which they came. Various studies have found that, in the long-term, refugees contribute significantly more in tax revenues than they cost taxpayers in the form of initial resettlement assistance or public benefits. Refugees also make significant contributions to local economies in that they have a particularly high rate of entrepreneurship, higher than other immigrants and the native-born population.

Furthermore, if refugees are no longer allowed to be resettled to Florida, it would disrupt the reunification of many families who have been waiting years to be reunited. Many refugees are resettled to Florida because they already have family members in the state. If Florida restricts their resettlement, many will likely exercise their lawful right to simply move to Florida

immediately after being resettled in another state so as to join their family – but in doing so, they will move away from vital employment assistance, language acquisition and cultural adjustment resources offered by their resettlement organization. Refugees can best integrate into the U.S. and quickly become financially self-sufficient when supported both by their family and by a local resettlement office.

As our state's governor, we urge you to keep the option open for local communities within Florida to continue to receive newly arrived refugees. As always, we are committed to praying for you as you lead our state.

Sincerely,

Rev. Donna Carlile, Chaplain, Church of the Nazarene, Avon Park
Rev. Steven Gregg, Senior Pastor, Creekside Community Church, Gainesville
Rev. Russell Johnson, Senior Pastor, Global Church, Miami Gardens
Rev. Bruce Mulder, Senior Pastor, Presbyterian Church, Clearwater
Rev. Wesley Porto, Senior Pastor, New Hope Presbyterian Church, Orlando
Rev. Susan Rogers, Senior Pastor, The Well at Springfield, Jacksonville
Rev. Dr. David Shelor, Senior Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Dunedin
Phil Ayres, Lead Pastor, LifePoint Christian Church, Longwood
Shawn Grosvenor, Pastor, Monticello Church of the Nazarene
Joy Laughridge, Pastor, Lakewood Presbyterian Church, Jacksonville
Clay Myatt, Assistant Pastor in Residence, Creekside Community Church Gainesville
Michael Raburn, Lead Pastor, Gainesville Vineyard
Michael Roop, Associate Pastor, Creekside Community Church, Gainesville
Gerron Showalter, Pastor, Port Orange Church of the Nazarene
Tiffany Thornton, Associate Pastor, Melbourne First Church of the Nazarene
Joel Tooley, Lead Pastor, Melbourne First Church of the Nazarene
Deidre Clark, Deacon, Oakland Presbyterian
Lori Chelf, Founder, Beyond90.org, Jacksonville
Kristin Friend, Mission Moment Coordinator, Emmaus Church Jacksonville
Jennifer Garrett, Director of Communications, St. Pete Underground, St. Petersburg
Clelia Garrity, Clergy, St. Simon's on the Sound Episcopal Church, Ft. Walton Beach
Stephanie Ilderton, Communications Coordinator, Covenant Presbyterian Church,
Winter Springs
Sheryl Shaw, North America Director, Global Teams, Winter Springs
Matthew Shiles, Missions Director, Northland Church, Longwood
Quina Aragon, Living Faith Bible Fellowship, Tampa
Jon Aragon, Living Faith Bible Fellowship, Tampa
Kathleen Arbogast, Melbourne First Church of the Nazarene, Palm Bay
Kim Belden, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Daytona Beach Shores
Erin Blackwell, First Baptist Orlando, Winter Garden
Akenia Bledsoe, Tampa Covenant Church
Merriel Bloomfield, Assembly of God, Jacksonville
Patricia Bolanos, Beth-El Nazarene Church, Miami
Amanda Boone, Rocky Bayou Baptist Church, Niceville
Rachel Brill, New Dimensions Christian Center, Milton
Kevin Brill, New Dimensions Christian Center, Milton
Sara Buffington, New Covenant, Winter Springs

Jennifer Chong, The Avenue Church, Delray Beach
 Rachel Christofel, Tampa Covenant Church, Temple Terrace
 Grace Chun, Creekside Community Church, Gainesville
 Melyssa Cordero, Underground Network, Tampa
 Kathleen Coughlin, Beach Church, Gainesville
 Kimberly Drake, Summit Church, Winter Park
 Tiffane Evans, New Life Fellowship, Tallahassee
 Daniel Farrokh, House Church, West Palm Beach
 Joanna Fowler, Redeemer City Church, Winter Haven
 Natalie Freitas, Rhythm Church, Miami Beach
 Dana Garlick, First Presbyterian Church of Dunedin, Clearwater
 Sarah Hartman, Truth Point, Loxahatchee
 Norman Hatter, PCUSA, Dunedin
 Laura Headley, Celebration Church, Orlando
 Patricia Hill, Faith Presbyterian Church, Gainesville
 Wendy Hofer, Creekside Community Church, Gainesville
 Hannah Janoe, Church of 11-22, Jacksonville
 Lark Kelsey, Creekside Community Church, Gainesville
 Christina Keshishian, Melbourne Beach
 Janet Kirk, Tomoka Christian Church, Port Orange
 Gene Kirk, Tomoka Christian Church, Port Orange
 Anna LaFemina, Celebration Orlando, Winter Park
 Benjamin Lowe, The Christian & Missionary Alliance, Gainesville
 Dr. Gregory Magruder, Senior Pastor, Parkview Baptist Church, Gainesville
 Lauren Martin, Melbourne First Church of the Nazarene, Melbourne Beach
 Michelle Mercer, Christian and Missionary Alliance, New Smyrna
 Dr. Jack Mercer, Senior Pastor, Church on the Drive, Orlando
 Cyd Miller, Central Christian Church, Saint Petersburg
 Megan Morrison, Cru, Miami
 Sandy Mercer, Church on the Drive, Orlando
 Pamela Musick, Melbourne First Church of the Nazarene, Palm Bay
 Karla Nachtsheim, Christian Family Chapel, Jacksonville
 Samuel Pagan, Bishop, Church of God, St. Augustine
 Tyler Pickett, Strategic Partnering Coordinator, Cru, Orlando
 Ryan Polonio, Pastor, Underground Network, Tampa
 Brennan Schneider, Greenhouse Church, Jacksonville
 Megan Schuliger, Rocky Bayou Baptist Church, Niceville
 Karen Smith, Crown Point Baptist, Jacksonville
 Deborah Tassell, Pastor, Mercy Church, Mt. Dora
 Thomas Santiago, Rhythm Church, Miami
 Casey Vaughn, Celebration Orlando
 Tami Sue Webster, The Cross, Orlando
 Dr. Brian Wilson, District Superintendent, Southern Florida District Church of the
 Nazarene, Jupiter
 Kristen Young, Engage Church, Tallahassee
 Sharon Binder, Dunedin
 Dr. Beth Carr, Naples
 Corie Colliton, West Palm Beach
 Amber Connell, Fleming Island

David Cook, Jacksonville
Val Edmands, High Springs
Lauren Fernandez, Miami Lakes
Lauren Fernandez, Hialeah
Krista Fleming, Windermere
James Gaylord, Crestview
Judith Hall, Brooksville
Hannah Hinojosa, Valparaiso
Kerry Hinote, Jacksonville
Hilary Hopkins, Tampa
Elizabeth Immel, Ponte Vedra
Syl Jarvis, Jacksonville
Christy Kolb, Milton
Amy Kushner, Lake Worth
Angela Luchko, Jacksonville
Raychel Manko, Boca Raton
Dee McCollum, Jacksonville
Joseph Musco, Sarasota
Penny Musco, Sarasota
Elisabeth Perdue, Apopka
Deanna Rees, Bradenton
Pierre Uwimana, Jacksonville
Amy Van Dyke, Titusville
Chelsea Van Eck, Cape Coral
Michelle Van Loon, Sarasota
Scott Wise, Jacksonville