

Governor Jay Inslee  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504

December 9, 2019

Dear Governor Inslee,

As evangelical Christians from throughout the state of Washington, we're writing to urge you to allow refugees to continue to be resettled to Washington 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. Washington 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 24,500 individuals from various countries have been resettled in Washington. 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 Washington; 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 Washington' economy. With a remarkably low statewide unemployment rate of just 4.6%, 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 Washington, it would disrupt the reunification of many families who have been waiting years to be reunited. Many refugees are resettled to *Washington* because they already have family members in the state. If Washington restricts their resettlement, many will likely exercise their lawful right to simply move to Washington 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 Washington to continue to receive newly arrived refugees. As always, we are committed to praying for you as you lead our state.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Robert Fairbanks, Senior Pastor, Immanuel Church, Spokane  
 Dr. Scott Starbuck, Senior Pastor, Manito Presbyterian Church, Spokane  
 Karaline Acone, Snohomish  
 Deanna Bax, Deacon, Colbert Presbyterian Church, Colbert  
 Joni Baxter, Nazarene, Spokane Valley  
 Patricia Castaneda, Comunidad Cristiana de Spokane, Spokane  
 Kristen Chesmore, Bellevue  
 Jessie Christensen, Enumclaw  
 Diana Cleveland, Mukilteo  
 Sarah Cuny, Summit Fellowship, Vancouver  
 Leanne Duke, Teacher, Mountain Church, Mount Vernon  
 Hannah Eberts, Quest Church, Sammamish  
 Rachel Fender, Church of the Nazarene, Zillah  
 Mark Finney, Pastor and Executive Director, Emmaus Church and World Relief Spokane  
 Victoria Foreman, Bellevue Presbyterian, Kirkland  
 Cynthia Giovi-Lester, Pullman  
 Renee Graybill, Spokane  
 Elizabeth Ingram, Moses Lake  
 Samantha Irwin, World Relief Seattle, Kennewick  
 Rosa Johansen, Immanuel, Spokane  
 Sandy Jones, Lay Person/Volunteer, Spokane First Church of the Nazarene  
 Amy Kenagy, Porch Board Member, The Porch Spokane  
 Lisa Keosababian, Woodinville  
 Hailey Kirsch, Summit View Church, Vancouver  
 Nathaniel Lambert, Yakima  
 Angeline Lau, Pastor, Japanese Baptist Church, Bothell  
 Clifford Luebben, South Hills Church, Kennewick  
 Terry McGonigal, Director of Church Engagement, Whitworth University, Spokane  
 Taylor McIlraith, Spokane  
 Kim Meschter, Renton  
 Becky Minister, Kennewick  
 Lindsey Newton, World Relief Volunteer, World Relief Spokane  
 Josiah Newton, World Relief Volunteer, World Relief Spokane  
 Sonia Niangpi, Federal Way  
 Come Nzibarega, Spokane  
 William Omnes, SIL International, Gig Harbor  
 Rosemary Otto, First Presbyterian Spokane

Carolyn Paxton, Faith, Richland

Chris Piper, Brush Prairie

Ken Primus, Director, World Relief Tri Cities, Richland

Jacob Reidt, Spokane

Elliot Ritzema, Board Chair, Bellingham Covenant Church

Linda Shook, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Shadle Park Presbyterian Church,  
Spokane

Mindy Smith, Associate Director-Church Engagement, Whitworth University, Spokane

Rose Tom, Imprint Church, Kirkland

Rachel Toroni, Auburn

Gwendolyn Waller, Lake Tapps

Sheyna Watkins, Quest Church, Seattle

Jean Wu, Bothell

Ann Yen, Duvall