

Governor Jay Robert "J.B." Pritzker
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

December 9, 2019

Dear Governor Pritzker,

As evangelical Christians from throughout the state of Illinois, we're writing to urge you to allow refugees to continue to be resettled to Illinois 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. Illinois 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 20,800 individuals from various countries have been resettled in Illinois. 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 Illinois; 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 Illinois' economy. With a remarkably low statewide unemployment rate of just 4.0%, 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 Illinois, it would disrupt the reunification of many families who have been waiting years to be reunited. Many refugees are resettled to *Illinois* because they already have family members in the state. If Illinois restricts their resettlement, many will likely exercise their lawful right to simply move to Illinois 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 Illinois to continue to receive newly arrived refugees. As always, we are committed to praying for you as you lead our state.

Sincerely,

Rev. Beth Cossin, Network Pastor, Heritage Church, Moline
Rev. Michael McAleese, Aurora
Rev. Jeremy Van Kley, Church of the Nazarene, Bourbonnais
Kari Alderson, Gathering Point, Kankakee
Angelina Alfaro, Social Worker, Beach Park
Joshua Anderson, Pastor, Redeemer Community Church, Aurora
Cassie Appleton, River Valley Christian Fellowship, West Chicago
Jamie Aten, Founder & Executive Director, Humanitarian Disaster Institute, Wheaton
Chelsea Bair, Decatur
Jennifer Bishop, First Free Evangelical Church of Chicago, Evanston
Hannah Bonifacius, New Life, Chicago
Sasha Brady, Highpoint Church, Wheaton
Sasha Brady, Wheaton
Rita Briggs, Pastor, Nazarene, Monticello
Jonathan Brooks, Pastor, Canaan Community Church, Chicago
Deidria Cantwell, Rockton
Lynn Catanus, Garden City Covenant Church, Chicago
Alison Chino, Rock Island
Jennifer Clark, Meal Ministry Coordinator, Redeemer Fellowship, Batavia
Wendy Cordero, Chicago
Isaiah Crawl, Catlin Church of Christ, Belgium
Roger Curless, Aurora
David Davis, Consultant, The Evangelical Alliance Mission, Winfield
Jill DeHaven, Christ Community Church, Sycamore
Johanna DeHaven, Cornerstone Anglican Church, Sycamore
Cindy Derry, Lisle
John Dingler, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Downers Grove
Owen Enoch, Wellspring Alliance Church, Wheaton
Josh Fenska, Senior Pastor, Redeemer Community Church, Aurora
Cyndi Fusek, Children and Youth Specialist, World Relief, Aurora
Lindsey Goetz, Children's Discipleship Coordinator, First Presbyterian Church of Aurora
Emily Gray, Sr. Vice President, World Relief, Chicago
Dena Griswold, The Journey, Fairfield
Judi Haugen, Wheaton
Ami Hileman, Wheaton College Graduate School, Bloomington
Shelley Hiller, Batavia
Elizabeth Houser, St. Judes, Peoria

Diane Jerdan, Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Warrenville
Dana Jewett, Willow Creek Community Church, La Grange Park
Fawn Julsaint, The Mission Church of the Nazarene, Chicago
Stephen Kafkas, Church of the Resurrection, Wheaton
Jeff Kersten, Vineyard Christian Church of Evanston, Des Plaines
Ellie Koranek, East White Oak Bible Church, Carlock
Daniel La Spata, Alderman, New Community Covenant Church, Chicago
Marchello Michaud, Morton Grove
Jeff Moore, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Aurora
Sadie Murbarger, Worship Arts Resident, Eastview Christian Church, El Paso
Kaly Nyathi, New Life, Chicago
Diane O'Neill, Chicago
Ina Osborn, United Methodist, Woodridge
Karl Ostroski, Grace and Peace Church, Chicago
Chrissy Palmerlee, Director of Ministry Services, Evangelical Covenant Church, Chicago
Mandy Poplawski, Mundelein
Ann Powers, Woodridge
Ruby Reveles, Trinity Church of the Nazarene, Montgomery
Stephanie Roberts, First Free Church, Chicago
Karen Romanovich, Glen Ellyn
John Ross, Aurora Christian Ministry Network, Batavia
Sarah Rubio, Elgin
Joseph Rumenapp, Methodologist, Concordia University-Portland, Chicago
Brittany Ryswyk, Lake Bluff
Kevin Sampson, Pastor, Renewal Church, West Chicago
Dr. Nathan Schau, Grayslake
John Schirle, Decatur
Alan Seaman, Chair, Applied Linguistics and International Education Department,
Wheaton College, Wellspring Alliance Church, West Chicago
Shawn Smith, Lincoln
Brittany Smith, Geneva
Matthew Soerens, US Director of Church Mobilization, World Relief, Aurora
Zachary Stallard, Location Pastor, Cornerstone Anglican Church, Chicago
Leslie Starasta, Lincoln
Christine Williams, World Relief DuPage/Aurora, Wheaton
Roxann Witt, Village Baptist, Plainfield
David Wood, Ministries Pastor, Village Bible Church, Aurora
Paul Zigterman, Lombard Christian Reformed Church, Villa Park