



June 10, 2019

Dear Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives,

The United States has a longstanding history of compassion for refugees, and their contributions to our communities are woven into the fabric of our great nation. Though the United States has historically resettled more refugees than any other nation, this lifesaving, strategic program continues to shrink. Last year, an estimated 1.2 million refugees were in imminent need of resettlement yet only 55,692 found safe homes – less than five percent. 68-percent of refugees needing resettlement were survivors of violence and torture, and more than half of all resettlement submissions in 2018 were for children. Surely, we can do better. The lives of children around the world depend on us doing better.

Of the 68 million displaced people and over 25 million refugees in the world, unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) are among the most vulnerable. URM children often live indefinitely in refugee camps or child-led households in heavily impoverished areas and are susceptible to human trafficking – both sex and labor trafficking – and exploitation. Since the inception of the URM program in 1980, approximately 13,000 URM children have resettled in the United States. These children have come from countries such as Sudan, Myanmar, and Cuba—where many were persecuted for their faith or witnessed the genocide of their families and communities.

The URM program helps refugee children adjust to life in the United States through critical services, including: living skills training, English language training, and mental health services. Though thousands of children have found renewed hope through the URM program, over 130,000 children became unaccompanied or were separated from their families in 2017 and over 13 million children remain refugees. In FY 2018 the United States resettled only 116 unaccompanied refugee children, less than .000009% of refugee children in need of safety.

Bethany is a global nonprofit that supports children and families with world-class social services, all designed to help families thrive. We have served refugees for more than 40 years and have resettled unaccompanied refugee children from refugee camps, in loving, stable families or small group homes that are best able to meet their unique needs. In fact, Bethany finds foster homes for more unaccompanied refugee minors than any other organization in the United States, with the state of Michigan welcoming more refugee minors than any other state.

This year in Michigan, Bethany is celebrating the high school graduation of 50 youth from 19 countries with 42 youth entering college and one joining the U.S. Navy. While completing their high school degree, 38 youth were employed at least part-time and most worked at least 40 hours per week. In Pennsylvania, Bethany is celebrating the graduation of 19 youth, many of whom are also already in the workforce working part-time. These children, despite the unspeakable trauma they have faced, are proof of the resilience and determination of millions of refugees worldwide eagerly awaiting the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

As we approach World Refugee Day on June 20, we ask you to stand with those whose voices have not been heard. We ask you to turn your attention to unity and work together to protect and ease the suffering of the millions of persecuted and uprooted people around the world. We ask that you consider policies through the eyes of refugees and immigrants and consider the contributions that refugees, even the children, make in our communities.

Sincerely,



Chris Palusky
President and CEO
Bethany Christian Services



Dona Abbott
Vice President of Refugee and Immigrant Services
Bethany Christian Services