

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

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July 17, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

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LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Dear Secretary Nielsen and Secretary Pompeo:

We write regarding the current administration and operation of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which has successfully resettled refugees from around the world who have enriched our nation and brought economic growth to our communities. The world is experiencing the largest refugee crisis in history as millions seek protection from unimaginable violence and hardship. Around the world, there are 22.5 million refugees – more than half of them children. The United States has proudly resettled refugees from the most vulnerable and persecuted populations, regardless of their faith or national origin.

Our country has a long bipartisan history of welcoming refugees, which both reflects American values and serves as a strong diplomatic tool. USRAP is a life-saving humanitarian program and is grounded in a public-private partnership model, resettling an average of 80,000 refugees annually for over 40 years. As part of this process, refugees must pass multi-step background checks, and once they are resettled in the United States, they quickly integrate, find employment, and begin giving back to their new communities. Our nation's role in responding to today's refugee crisis will determine our moral, diplomatic, and economic standing among world leaders.

In September 2017, your Administration announced a Presidential Determination of 45,000 for Fiscal Year 2018, the lowest refugee admissions ceiling ever set. To meet this number, the United States must admit 3,750 refugees each month. However, as of July 9th, only 16,429 refugees have arrived in the U.S. At this pace, the United States may only admit 20,000 refugees for this fiscal year, well short of the 45,000 ceiling set by the Administration.

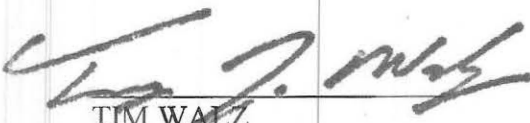
We respectfully request answers to the following questions regarding the implementation of the refugee resettlement program for FY18:


- In October 2017, DHS announced additional security screening procedures for refugee admissions. How have these measures been implemented to ensure that refugees are admitted at a timely rate? Which other or additional agencies, if any, are handling security screenings and what are the operations in place to ensure cases are processed efficiently?

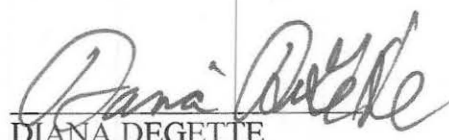
- What steps, if any, is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) taking to increase the rate at which refugees are processed and admitted in a good faith effort to meet the 45,000 refugee admissions goal for FY 2018?
- Given the 90% reduction in admissions of Muslim refugees in the first six months of FY 2018 compared to the first six months of FY 2017, what steps, if any, is DHS taking to ensure the United States is committed to resettling the most vulnerable, regardless of faith or country of origin?
- How have staffing changes at the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) impacted refugee resettlement and coordination with DHS?
- What is the current decision-making process at PRM given vacancies in leadership positions? How is the administration ensuring that decisions are being made by experts in refugee protection, rather than removed staff elsewhere at the Department of State? What steps, if any, is DHS taking to ensure a productive working relationship with PRM given staffing changes?
- Is the proposal to transfer some of PRM's responsibilities to DHS or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) still being considered? If so, what is the process, timeline, and criteria for these decisions? And what are plans to consult with Congress prior to any determination being made?
- The Administration has supported reducing refugee admissions in favor of other forms of international humanitarian assistance. What specific types of foreign assistance does your Administration support, and what steps will you take to ensure it is delivered effectively? Given that refugee resettlement also supports our foreign policy priorities, describe the ways in which resettlement can support U.S. humanitarian assistance efforts.

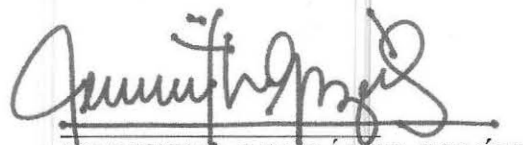
As the United States aims to put its values and interests first, we must not forget that refugees fill critical roles in our economy, and that resettling the world's most vulnerable populations has a rich bipartisan tradition. Resettling refugees is a way that the United States can live out its core values and ensure a more stable and democratic world. We implore you to increase the pace of arrivals for the remainder of the fiscal year to meet your Presidential Determination of 45,000. Overcoming the current global humanitarian crisis we face requires your leadership. Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to your response to our questions no later than August 3rd.

Sincerely,


TIM WALZ
Member of Congress


STEVE STIVERS
Member of Congress


DIANA DEGETTE
Member of Congress

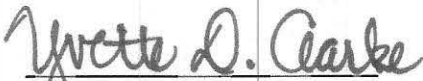

JENNIFER GONZÁLEZ COLÓN
Member of Congress



ANTHONY G. BROWN
Member of Congress



LEONARD LANCE
Member of Congress



YVETTE D. CLARKE
Member of Congress



ROGER MARSHALL
Member of Congress



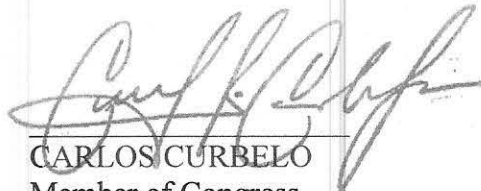
COLLEEN HANABUSA
Member of Congress



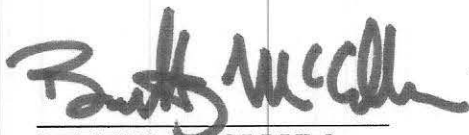
STEVE RUSSELL
Member of Congress



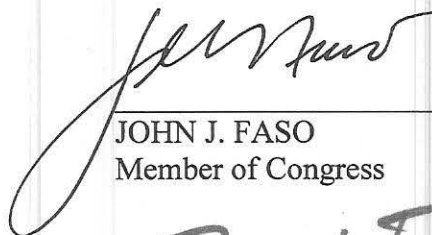
BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress



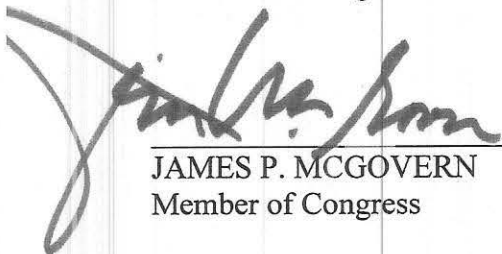
CARLOS CURBELO
Member of Congress



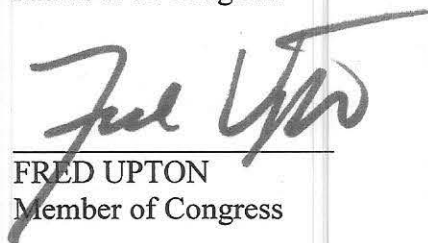
BETTY MCCOLLUM
Member of Congress



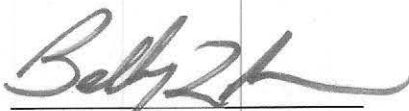
JOHN J. FASO
Member of Congress



JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress



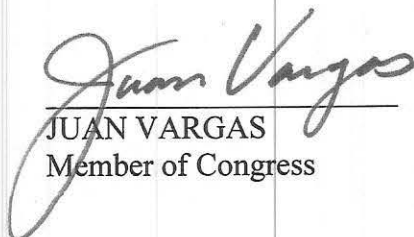
FRED UPTON
Member of Congress



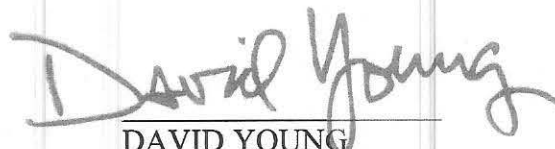
BOBBY RUSH
Member of Congress



ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN
Member of Congress




JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress



DAVID YOUNG
Member of Congress



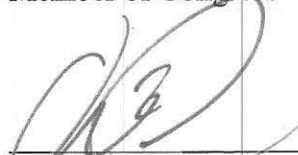
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
Member of Congress



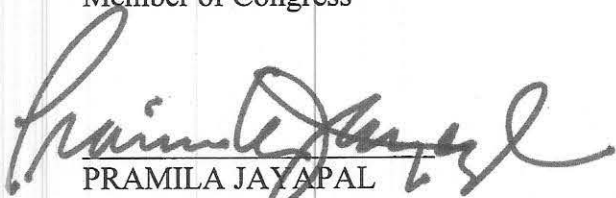
JACKIE SPEIER
Member of Congress



EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress



ANDRÉ CARSON
Member of Congress



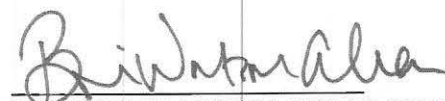
PRAMILA JAYAPAL
Member of Congress



RO KHANNA
Member of Congress



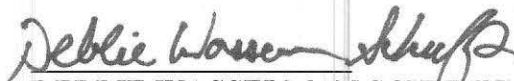
TIM RYAN
Member of Congress



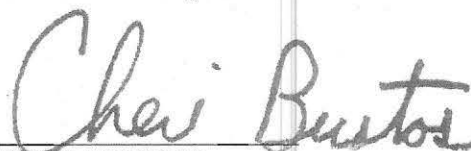
BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress



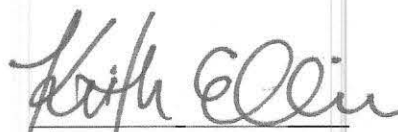
CHELLIE PINGREE
Member of Congress



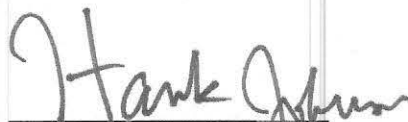
DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
Member of Congress



CHERI BUSTOS
Member of Congress



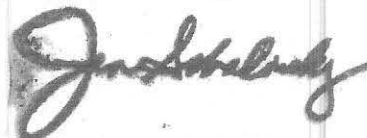
KEITH ELLISON
Member of Congress



HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.
Member of Congress



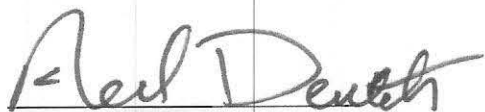
JAMIE RASKIN
Member of Congress



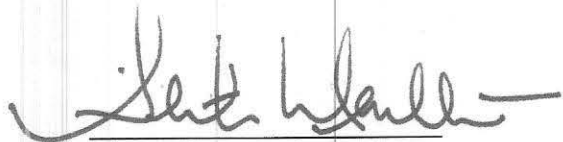
JAN SCHAKOWSKY
Member of Congress



SALUD CARBAJAL
Member of Congress



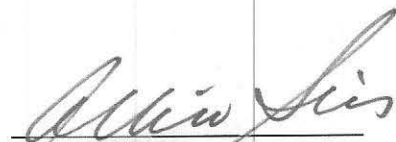
TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress



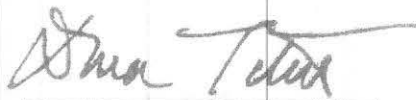
SETH MOULTON
Member of Congress



SCOTT H. PETERS
Member of Congress



ALBIO SIRES
Member of Congress



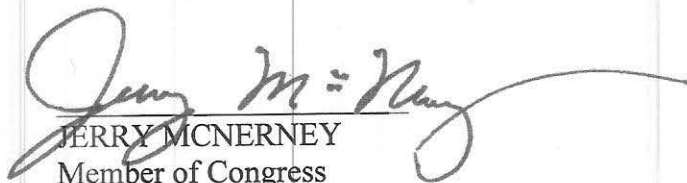
DINA TITUS
Member of Congress



JOHN K. DELANEY
Member of Congress



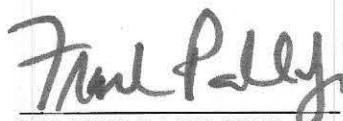
EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON
Member of Congress




JERRY MCNERNEY
Member of Congress



GWEN MOORE
Member of Congress



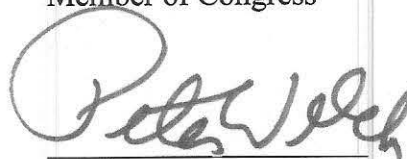
FRANK PALLONE, JR.
Member of Congress



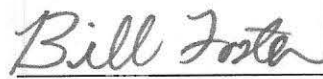
MIKE QUIGLEY
Member of Congress



DARREN SOTO
Member of Congress



PETER WELCH
Member of Congress




BILL FOSTER
Member of Congress



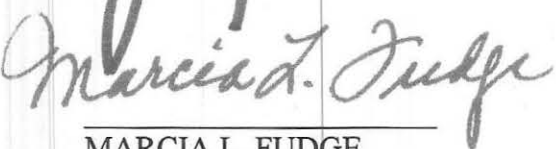
ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress



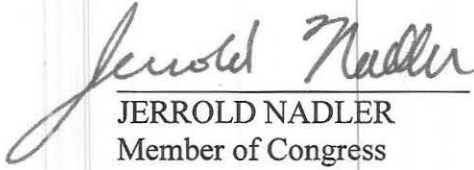
RICHARD M. NOLAN
Member of Congress




JIMMY PANETTA
Member of Congress



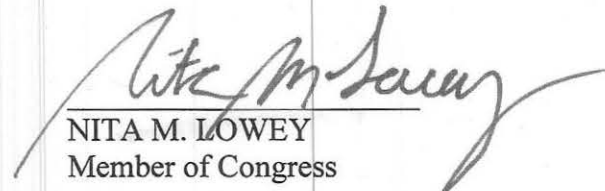
MARCIA L. FUDGE
Member of Congress




JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress



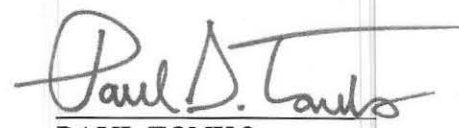
LINDA T. SANCHEZ
Member of Congress



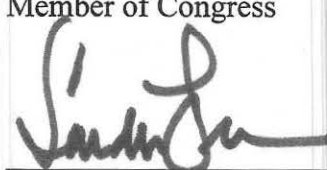
NITA M. LOWEY
Member of Congress



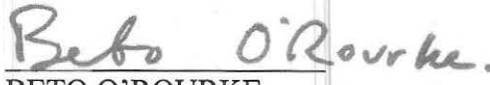
RANDY HULTGREN
Member of Congress




PAUL TONKO
Member of Congress




SANDER LEVIN
Member of Congress



BETO O'ROURKE
Member of Congress



BRENDAN F. BOYLE
Member of Congress



RICK LARSEN
Member of Congress



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

September 10, 2018

The Honorable Tim Walz
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Walz:

Thank you for your July 17, 2018 letter. Secretary Nielsen has asked that I respond on her behalf.

The Department of Homeland Security appreciates your interest and support of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). We are proud of the USRAP's longstanding history of resettling some of the world's most vulnerable refugees in the United States, while ensuring that, now and in the future, we employ rigorous security measures to protect against national security threats. Please find the enclosed responses to your questions.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important matter. The co-signers of your letter will receive separate, identical responses. Should you require additional assistance, please have your staff contact the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Francis Cissna".

L. Francis Cissna
Director

Enclosure

**The Department of Homeland Security's Response to
Representative Walz's July 17, 2018 Letter**

- 1. In October 2017, DHS announced additional security screening procedures for refugee admissions. How have these measures been implemented to ensure that refugees are admitted at a timely rate? Which other or additional agencies, if any, are handling security screenings and what are the operations in place to ensure cases are processed efficiently?**

As you are aware, a number of Executive Orders have impacted the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) over the past year and half. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) initially completed a 120-day review of the entire USRAP at the end of October 2017, and then launched a 90-day review to assess possible risks associated for certain specific refugee populations. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has worked closely with the Department of State (DOS), and the vetting agencies, over the past year to analyze the program and introduce efforts to make security measures more robust. While necessary, these reviews and enhancements have lengthened processing times for some cases and as a result admissions have slowed. A period of slower admissions is not uncommon when new measures are implemented.

In addition, USCIS has placed a greater emphasis on addressing the growing workload in the domestic asylum program. USCIS is able to quickly deploy resources to accommodate our critical asylum priorities by reassigning refugee officers to domestic duties with the asylum program. This has necessarily meant that USCIS has fewer trained officers readily available to conduct refugee interviews overseas.

Nonetheless, USCIS continues to conduct refugee processing circuit rides to interview refugee applicants, and to interview refugee applicants in locations where USCIS has staff posted abroad.

With regard to security screening, USRAP screening is a shared responsibility. It includes both biometric and biographic checks at multiple stages during the process, including immediately before a refugee applicant's departure to the United States and upon his or her arrival in the United States. Biographic checks are initiated by the Resettlement Support Centers which are managed by DOS. Biometric checks are conducted by DHS. The results of all security checks are reviewed and/or resolved by DHS. As noted earlier, a period of slower processing is not uncommon whenever new measures are implemented. We defer to our vetting partners on their processes and timelines.

For a detailed description of the biometric and biographic checks, please see <https://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>.

- 2. What steps if any, is the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) taking to increase the rate at which refugees are processed and admitted in a good faith effort to meet the 45,000 refugee admissions goal for FY 2018?**

As mentioned previously, DHS, together with DOS, law enforcement, and the intelligence community, have worked very hard in the last year to analyze the USRAP and introduce new measures to make the program more secure and enhance national security. The implementation of new security vetting procedures, while necessary, has lengthened processing times for some cases which has resulted in slower admissions. The need to address the domestic asylum backlog has also been taken into account and has been prioritized in terms of future resource allocation. We anticipate that this is a temporary impact and that over time, as we and our vetting partners adjust to these changes and address resources constraints, the process will normalize.

USCIS continues to conduct refugee processing circuit rides to interview refugee applicants, and to interview refugee applicants in locations where USCIS has staff posted abroad. USCIS has also assigned refugee officers to domestic duties with the asylum program. This has necessarily meant that USCIS has fewer officers available to conduct refugee interviews overseas. The Refugee Affairs Division will continue to support the Asylum Division in its protection mission and efforts to address the backlog by detailing staff to the Asylum Division for the remainder of the fiscal year. DHS is currently assessing whether such assistance will continue for the upcoming fiscal year, and if so, at what level.

We defer to our vetting partners on the temporary impact of adjusting to recent changes and to DOS on the pace of admissions.

- 3. Given the 90% reduction in admissions of Muslim refugees in the first six months of FY 2018 compared to the first six months of FY 2017, what steps, if any, is DHS taking to ensure the United States is committed to resettling the most vulnerable, regardless of faith or country of origin?**

DHS is proud of the USRAP's longstanding history of resettling some of the world's most vulnerable refugees in the United States. The recently implemented enhanced vetting measures apply regardless of religion or ethnic composition. The populations subject to the additional specialized screening were identified through an interagency process first established after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The current list of Security Advisory Opinion countries was last updated in 2015 and is currently under review based on results of the 90-day review pursuant to Executive Order 13815, *Resuming the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program with Enhanced Vetting Capabilities*.

- 4. How have staffing changes at the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) impacted refugee resettlement and coordination with DHS?**

DHS's working relationship with PRM remains steady and productive.

- 5. What is the current decision-making process at PRM given vacancies in leadership positions? How is the administration ensuring that decisions are being made by experts in refugee protection, rather than removed staff elsewhere at the Department of State? What steps, if any, is DHS taking to ensure a productive working relationship with PRM given staffing changes?**

DHS defers to DOS regarding the decision-making process at PRM. DHS's working relationship with PRM remains steady and productive.

- 6. Is the proposal to transfer some of PRM's responsibilities to DHS or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) still being considered? If so, what is the process, timeline, and criteria for these decisions? And what are plans to consult with Congress prior to any determination being made?**

DHS defers to DOS for a response to this question.

- 7. The Administration has supported reducing refugee admissions in favor of other forms of international humanitarian assistance. What specific types of foreign assistance does your Administration support, and what steps will you take to ensure it is delivered effectively? Given that refugee resettlement also supports our foreign policy priorities, describe the ways in which resettlement can support U.S. humanitarian assistance efforts.**

DHS defers to DOS for a response to this question.