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August 5, 2019

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 3:24 pm, Aug 05, 2019

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretaries Azar, McAleenan, and Pompeo:

I write to express my strong concerns about reports that the Trump administration is considering setting the refugee cap for 2020 at zero—effectively shutting down refugee admissions for the year. I urge you in the strongest terms to reject this misguided idea and to set a refugee cap that appropriately reflects the growing international need.

The United States has welcomed more than three million refugees since 1975. These individuals did not simply decide that life would be more conformable in America and many, if not most, would have preferred to remain in their homes. No, these men, women and children were forced to flee—from persecution, from violence and from war. Indeed, the UN estimates that 25 people were forced from their homes every minute last year and more than 70 million people have now been forcibly displaced by conflict and persecution—the highest number the UN refugee agency has ever seen.

Refugees helped found and build this country and they continue to contribute in profoundly meaningful ways. It is simply wrong to assert that refugees are a burden on American communities; they serve as teachers, doctors, small business owners, and members of the military. It is similarly inaccurate to imply that refugees pose some existential risk to the country or to Americans. Refugees must complete a lengthy and thorough screening and vetting

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process—a process that typically takes between 18 and 24 months—before coming to the United States.

Setting a refugee cap of zero in the face of unprecedented global need would be a complete abdication of America's role as a refuge for those fleeing persecution, a defender of freedom and human rights, and a beacon of hope for millions around the world. It would also be a shameful assault on some of America's most basic values. I therefore implore to reject any attempts to shut down the refugee admissions process and urge you to instead work with Congress to raise the refugee admissions cap for 2020.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ron" and last name "Wyden" clearly distinguishable.

Ron Wyden
United States Senator



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

September 24, 2019

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Wyden:

Thank you for your August 5, 2019 letter. Acting Secretary McAleenan asked that I respond on his behalf.

As you expressed in your letter, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) has a long history of resettling refugees in the United States and reflects this country's highest values and aspirations of compassion, generosity, and leadership.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a partner of the USRAP, remains committed to the program's mission and continues to interview refugee applicants overseas. The United States' commitment to assisting refugees extends beyond the USRAP. The United States also provides humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations around the world and offering protection to those with bona fide claims seeking asylum domestically. USCIS is working to address the challenges confronted in processing asylum requests of tens of thousands of asylum seekers in the United States. Timely processing of asylum applications is not only beneficial to legitimate asylum seekers, but also bolsters the integrity of the program and security of the American people.

Discussions regarding next fiscal year's refugee admissions ceiling are underway and will take into account the U.S. Government's holistic approach to humanitarian assistance, which includes the critical challenge of responding to the ongoing crisis at the Southwest Border. As the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) recently noted in its "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2018" report: "As in 2017, the United States of America continued to be the largest recipient of new asylum applications" (p. 42), and "[t]he largest asylum-seeker population at the end of 2018 continued to be in the United States of America" (p. 47).¹ USCIS must also address its backlog of affirmative asylum cases while maintaining adequate resources to conduct credible fear screenings for asylum seekers subject to expedited removal and to conduct fear assessments for individuals who express a fear of return to Mexico during the Migrant Protection Protocols process along the Southwest Border. Addressing the affirmative asylum backlog is critical since the backlog can be exploited and used to undermine public safety, national security and the integrity of the asylum program.

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/5d08d7ee7.pdf>

The Honorable Ron Wyden
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Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs at (202) 272-1940.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken C II". The signature is stylized, with the "K" and "C" being prominent and the "II" written as two vertical strokes.

Ken Cuccinelli II
Acting Director