

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20510

August 21, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our concern regarding reports that the Administration is considering a drastic reduction in the number of refugees resettled in the United States. The proposal to shift the State Department Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to another government agency is also alarming.<sup>1</sup> The State Department has traditionally advocated in favor of refugee resettlement as a key component of American foreign policy, but the United States has closed its doors to the world with cruel policies that will restrict the resettlement of vulnerable refugees and undermine American diplomatic engagement. These proposals will signal to the international community that the United States no longer prioritizes protecting refugees displaced by conflict or persecution. The United States, and Connecticut in particular, has a proud moral tradition and heritage of aiding refugees who need our help when their homelands are in turmoil—a tradition and heritage that we must maintain today. On behalf of Connecticut residents, we urge you to honor the United States' long tradition of resettling the world's most vulnerable refugees in communities nationwide by resettling at least 75,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2019 and keeping PRM within the State Department.

There are tens of thousands of refugees fleeing war, oppression, and persecution throughout the world. News reports suggest the Administration is considering caps of 15,000<sup>2</sup> or 25,000<sup>3</sup> refugees per year, which would represent the lowest cap on refugees admitted to the United States since the establishment of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) in 1980. This reduction is even more restrictive than the Fiscal Year 2018 cap of 45,000 refugees, particularly given estimates that the United States will only resettle 20,000 refugees this year. Many nations hosting substantial numbers of refugees do not have adequate resources to support these populations alone and require American support. Decreasing the number of refugees admitted would betray our humanitarian commitments and damage relations with countries that look to the United States for assistance as a world leader.

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<sup>1</sup> De Luce, Dan and Robbie Gramer. "White House Weighs Taking Refugee Programs Away From State Department." *Foreign Policy* May 2, 2018. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/02/white-house-weighs-stripping-state-department-of-control-over-refugee-policy-u-s-agency-for-international-development-trump-pompeo-immigration/>.

<sup>2</sup> Cook, Nancy, Nahal Toosi and Ted Hesson. "Trump pushed last year for drastic refugee cuts." *Politico* August 2, 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/08/02/trump-immigration-refugee-caps-759708>.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, Julie Hirschfeld. "White House Weighs Another Reduction in Refugees Admitted to U.S." *New York Times* August 1, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/01/us/politics/trump-refugees-reduction.html>.

The Administration seeks to justify these proposals using unfounded arguments against refugee resettlement. Administration officials have indicated that resources are being reallocated to process the legal claims of asylum-seekers rather than resettle refugees. Yet these claims are based on exaggerated trends given that border-crossing arrests are at historic lows and the rate of Customs and Border Patrol apprehensions along the southern border in 2017—303,916 arrests—is less than half the 2007 rate of 858,638 arrests.<sup>4</sup> Resettling asylum seekers should not compromise refugee resettlement, but the Administration is attempting to restructure our immigration system to prioritize merit and skill over protection from persecution and family reunification. The Administration additionally overstates the potential threat posed by refugees resettled in the United States. Refugees are already among the most extensively vetted individuals to enter the United States and alleged security concerns are no reason to cap the USRAP. These baseless justifications must be countered with policies that will preserve the United States’ moral integrity and humanitarian tradition.

We also urge you to reject any proposal to relocate PRM and ensure that the State Department continues to have an active role in the refugee resettlement process. Shifting PRM out of the State Department is part of a broader agenda to cripple USRAP and will represent the United States’ withdrawal from the global refugee crisis. For the last 25 years, PRM has carried out critical diplomatic and policy engagement on behalf of refugees, victims of conflict, and stateless people worldwide. Careful coordination with other countries throughout the refugee resettlement process is crucial and requires the foreign policy expertise and skillsets unique to the State Department. The Administration claims that this transfer would produce a more effective and cost-efficient approach to refugee resettlement. But refugee resettlement is an essential component of U.S. foreign policy and PRM must remain within the jurisdiction of the State Department to enhance American moral and diplomatic leadership abroad.

Our state serves as a national model for refugee resettlement. Connecticut has resettled almost 7,000 refugees since 2005 and there are several resettlement agencies throughout the state that provide essential case management and employment services to refugees. Representatives from Connecticut resettlement agencies have shared stories of the courage, strength, and resilience that refugees bring to their communities as well as their contributions to the economic fabric of our state. They have expressed deep concerns about further cuts to USRAP and the Trump Administration’s efforts to slow refugee resettlement by implementing the travel ban, reducing refugee vetting interviews overseas, and diverting interview officers. The President and CEO of the Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI)—Claudia Connor—shared that potential caps are “deeply disheartening” given that resettlement is a lifesaving opportunity for refugees enduring humanitarian crises overseas. We are proud of the compassionate Connecticut residents who welcome and support the world’s most vulnerable, and we hope to continue to welcome refugees who have the opportunity to make a home in our great state.

Though victims of the global conflicts that displaced them, refugees are also resilient survivors who embrace their new lives and contribute to their communities, even after harrowing journeys to the United States. On June 20, 2018—World Refugee Day—you articulated your support for refugees and issued a statement to commemorate “the strength, courage, and

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<sup>4</sup> Mark, Michelle and Shayanne Gal. “Border-crossing arrests are at historic lows—but Trump is still bemoaning a ‘drastic surge’ in illegal immigration.” *Business Insider* April 6, 2018. <https://www.businessinsider.com/border-crossings-arrests-trump-historic-low-data-charts-2018-4>.

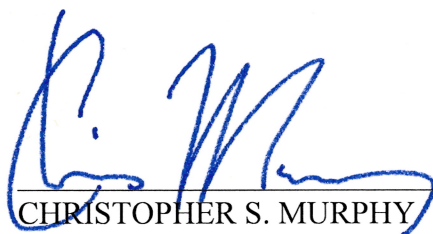
resilience of millions of refugees worldwide who have been forced to flee their homes due to persecution and conflict.”<sup>5</sup> You further committed the United States to continuing “to help the world’s most vulnerable refugees, reflecting the deeply held values of the American people.”<sup>6</sup> As the Administration considers adjustments to worldwide refugee ceiling and regional allocations for the upcoming fiscal year, we urge you to honor this important commitment by protecting USRAP, encouraging the resettlement of at least 75,000 refugees in Fiscal Year 2019, and advocating for PRM to remain within the State Department’s jurisdiction. We also ask that you consult with Congress and reaffirm the United States’ commitment to resettling the world’s most vulnerable populations as a key tenet of American foreign policy.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senate



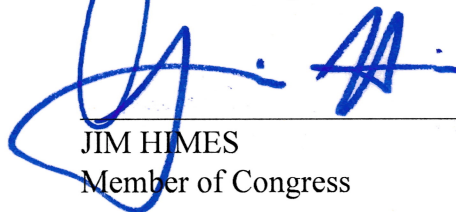
ROSA L. DELAURO  
Member of Congress



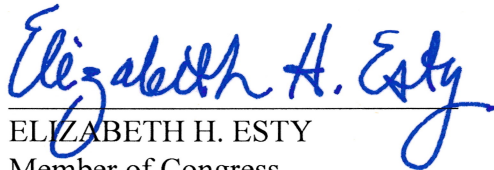
JOHN B. LARSON  
Member of Congress



JOE COURTNEY  
Member of Congress



JIM HIMES  
Member of Congress



ELIZABETH H. ESTY  
Member of Congress

<sup>5</sup> Press Statement. “United States Commemorates World Refugee Day.” June 20, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/06/283358.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Press Statement. “United States Commemorates World Refugee Day.” June 20, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/06/283358.htm>.