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Statement on Refugee and Asylum Provisions

At a time when the Senate is considering the modernization of our immigration laws, we also have the opportunity to ensure that the United States strengthens protections for those fleeing persecution, including the many Christians facing religious persecution around the world.

The bipartisan Senate immigration bill being marked up this week includes several important provisions that increase program efficiency and improve protection of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people. For example, it eliminates the arbitrary one-year filing deadline so that those who have a valid persecution claim are not turned away because they did not file their claims within a year. This often happens due to challenges understanding our system, navigating the asylum system in English and completing the extensive work involved in preparing an asylum application.

The bill will also reform adjudication of asylum claims, transferring jurisdiction from judges to expert, trained asylum officers, avoiding lengthy and costly court proceedings. This provision will allow asylum seekers to explain their story in a non-adversarial setting and will make it more likely that genuine refugees are identified and protected.

Additionally, the bill allows the administration to designate specific groups of humanitarian concern in order to adopt efficient processes for adjudicating their claims. This will strengthen efforts to protect persecuted religious minorities, expediting their approval for resettlement in the United States if they meet specific criteria.

Finally, the bill establishes a new Office of Citizenship and New Americans to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the United States. The new office will promote public-private partnerships involving churches, community service organizations, and faith-based NGOs in welcoming newcomers and helping them to become contributing members of our communities as quickly as possible.

The United States has a proud history of protecting refugees who flee persecution and seek to rebuild their lives in freedom. The Senate's bipartisan bill strengthens our asylum process and makes the refugee resettlement program a greater life-saving protection tool. This will save our government resources and ensure that the processes already in place are working as efficiently and fairly as possible. In doing so, the United States will continue to provide refuge to the vulnerable and will carry on a strong tradition of being a humanitarian leader helping those who are seeking safety and a new life.