

The Honorable Senator Dick Durbin
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The Honorable Senator Mark Kirk
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December 17, 2015

Dear Senator Durbin and Senator Kirk,

Thank you for your leadership and service to our country and our state. Illinois has proudly welcomed refugees and immigrants over the past decades, including those from Syria, who have contributed richly to our state and our community.

We are deeply saddened by the horrific tragedies in Paris and Beirut. These recent events and the continuing conflicts in Syria should lead us to action against those who seek to do evil. But we believe it is a mistake to respond by halting resettlement of refugees, including Syrian refugees, in our state and country. These refugees, most of whom are women and children, are the very victims of the terror that we are fighting against. More than anyone else, they are in desperate need of protection from our common enemies. As a nation and a state that have proudly led the way as a refuge for those fleeing persecution, we should be welcoming refugees, especially during this critical time, rather than closing the doors on them.

We fully understand concerns of national security and public safety and hence the importance of thorough background checks for those who come into our country and state. That is why we currently have in place a robust and extensive vetting process for refugee entries. Our lengthy security protocol, vastly different from that of many European countries responding to migrants arriving at their borders, take 18-24 months and include biographic and biometric background checks by the U.S. Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Defense as well as the FBI and the National Counterterrorism Center.

Refugees are subject to the highest level of security checks of any category of travelers to the U.S. Our current system has been time-tested and effective. With more than 3 million refugees admitted to the U.S. since the 1970s, there has never been a terrorist attack perpetrated in U.S. by an individual admitted through the refugee resettlement program. We should take caution—and we are—but we also cannot let fear drive us to turn away, even temporarily, to those fleeing persecution. This does not reflect the moral courage and compassion characteristic of our great nation and great state of Illinois.

As Christians compelled by our call to welcome the least of these as we would welcome our Lord Jesus Himself (Matthew 25), we are eager to work with you, with Governor Rauner, and with all elected officials to receive the strangers and the vulnerable—each made in the image of God—among us.

As Congress considers any forthcoming legislation on refugee resettlement, we respectfully ask you to reject cutbacks and damaging changes on the current U.S. resettlement program. We should do more rather than less to protect refugees, including many persecuted Christians, from the Middle East and elsewhere. We also ask that our federal and state governments do not exclude refugees solely on the basis on their religion or nationality, but evaluate each case on its own merit.

We, evangelical leaders and citizens of Illinois, are praying for you. Our faith communities will support you in your courageous leadership to welcome refugees and immigrants.

Sincerely,

Paco Amador, Pastor, New Life Community Church Little Village, Chicago

Mike Borgwardt, Pastor, Crossroads Christian Church, Chicago

Paul DeHavem, Campus Pastor, Christ Community Church, DeKalb

Eric Flood, Senior Pastor, South Park Church, Park Ridge

Dave Ferguson, Lead Pastor, Community Christian Church, Naperville

Bill & Lynne Hybels, Senior Pastor and Advocate for Global Engagement, Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington

Mark D. Johnson, Pastor/Executive Director, Tapestry Fellowship/City First Foundation, Chicago

Jonathan Kindberg, Senior Pastor, All Nations Anglican Church, Carol Stream

Michael Langer, Pastor, Glen Ellyn Covenant Church, Glen Ellyn

Steven Lee, Pastor of Small Groups & Community Outreach, College Church, Wheaton

Ronald May, Senior Pastor, Ethos Presbyterian Church, Chicago

Chris McElwee, Pastor of Local Impact, Wheaton Bible Church, West Chicago

Kirk Moore, Pastor, St Paul's United Church of Christ, Downers Grove

Chi Chi Okwu, Associate Pastor, Willow Chicago, Chicago

Tom Terrell, Pastor, Christ Lutheran Church, Chicago

Ron Zappia, Lead Pastor, Harvest Naperville, Naperville