

Governor Bill Lee  
Office of the Governor  
State Capitol, 1st Floor  
600 Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. Blvd.  
Nashville, TN 37243

December 10, 2019

Dear Governor Lee:

As Faith Leaders serving a diverse array of believers in Chattanooga and Hamilton County, we share some core values:

- We believe that all human beings reflect the image of the Holy
- We believe that all people deserve to be treated with dignity
- We believe that we share a calling to care for the oppressed, dispossessed, and vulnerable.

These shared values compel us to reach out to you regarding your role as Governor of Tennessee and President Trump's Executive Order on Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement.

As you are well aware, this Executive order **requires the consent of States, County and Municipal Governments for the continued resettlement of refugees.**

We urge you, as Governor of Tennessee, **to consent to the resettlement of refugees, and encourage local Tennessee Municipal and County Governments to likewise give consent for the resettlement of refugees in their communities.**

The internationally accepted definition of a refugee is **someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence.** Candidates for refugee resettlement are extensively vetted by our State Department, and only a small portion of those who are displaced are resettled globally, much less in the United States.

Our nation has a long history of welcoming refugees, stretching back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the aftermath of World War II, providing refuge became a moral imperative for Americans representing an array of faith backgrounds. Our investment in them as they have become part of the fabric of our country has paid returns that have enriched us intellectually, culturally, and financially. Despite the pernicious characterization of refugees as a drain on our community resources, a recent policy paper published by the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania notes that **for every dollar the U.S. government spends on refugees, we see a return of two dollars in the economy within five years.**<sup>1</sup> While some new arrivals seek government assistance, refugees who are already integrated into the economy help cover the costs of new arrivals.

Tennesseans serving refugee resettlement services, such as Hamilton County's own Bridge Refugee Services, can attest to the fact that refugees often come with skills, education, and ideas that help our communities thrive.

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<sup>1</sup><https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/2720-the-economic-impact-of-refugee-admission->

**Driven by a number of conflicts across the world, the number of people who are displaced globally is the highest that it has been since WWII. Yet, the current Refugee resettlement ceiling for the United States is the lowest it has been in decades.<sup>2</sup>**

Consenting to refugee resettlement in Tennessee not only makes our communities thrive, but it helps to remedy the global problem of displacement due to violence and persecution.

Tennesseans take pride in being the Volunteer State: We are the first to show up, dig in, and build bridges, when there's a sign of trouble. We believe that welcoming our brothers and sisters from across the globe when they face trouble and danger best captures that spirit. As Tennesseans, we have an opportunity to put our compassion into action.

Governor Lee, along with your leadership, we are grateful for your constant prayers for Tennessee.

We keep you in our prayers, and are grateful for your voice. Please consider the prayers of the **more than 70.8 Million displaced people across the world.<sup>3</sup>** We urge you, to dream alongside them about how our beloved state/county/city might faithfully respond to this Executive Order. ***Please ensure Tennessee remains a place of welcome by consenting to refugee resettlement.***

Sincerely,

The Reverend Dr. Thomas O. Bagley, Syndeo Community (PCUSA)

Rev V. Thomas Banks

Rev. Laura Becker, Northminster Presbyterian Church

Rev. April Berends, Grace Episcopal Church, Chattanooga

The Rev. Claire Brown, St. Paul's Episcopal Church Chattanooga

The Rev. Suzanne Burch, Deacon, St. Paul's Episcopal Church

The Rev. Susan J. Butler, Retired Rector. Grace Episcopal Church

Kate Caldwell, Chattanooga Friends Meeting

Rev. Alaina Cobb, Mercy Junction, Interfaith

The Rev. Taylor W. Dinsmore, St. Timothy's Episcopal Church

Rev. Brandon Gilvin, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Chattanooga

Rev. Mandy Goheen, Unitarian Universalist Church of Chattanooga

Elder Lionel Hodges, Renaissance Presbyterian Church

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/07/key-facts-about-refugees-to-the-u-s/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/>

Rev. Jonathan Hyde, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Chattanooga

Russ Kerr, Director of Children's Ministry, Rivermont Presbyterian Church

Rev. Josh Kilbourne, Senior Pastor, Signal Crest United Methodist Church, Signal Mountain

The Rev. Leyla King, Rector, Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church

Rev. Catherine A. Meyer

Rabbi Craig Lewis, Mizpah Congregation

Dr. Jaclyn A. Michael, Professor of Religious Studies, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

Rev. Charles Neal, Minister Emeritus, First-Centenary United Methodist Church

Audrey Ramsey, Unity of Chattanooga

Rev John Rouser, St Peter's Episcopal Church

Rev. Fayann M. Schmidt, Unity of Chattanooga.

Josh R. Singh, Christian leader

Rabbi Susan Tandler, Congregation B'nai Zion

Rev. Tricia Dillon Thomas, Renaissance Presbyterian Church

Rev. Kate Stulce, Pilgrim Congregational UCC

Rev. Dr. Clay Thomas, Pastor, Rivermont Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Joshua Weaver, Deacon at St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church, Ooltewah

The Rev. Ann G. Weeks, Episcopal Diocese of East TN

The Rev. Brad Whitaker, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Chattanooga

The Reverend Joe Woodfin, Associate Rector St. Paul's Episcopal Church

Rev. Candace Worth, Pastor New Hope Presbyterian Church