



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

November 11, 2019

Dear Governor Lee,

On behalf of our respective foundations, we urge you to continue the refugee resettlement program in Tennessee.

**Refugees are thoroughly vetted.** There is a common misconception that refugees are a threat to our nation. However, resettlement is the most difficult way to enter the U.S., and refugees are the most thoroughly vetted individuals in the U.S., going through all screenings before they arrive. The [vetting process](#) is arduous and they often have been waiting for years to enter the United States. Vetting includes biometric and biographic checks; interagency intelligence sharing; screenings against multiple domestic and international terrorist and criminal databases; background investigations by the FBI, Department of Defense, State Department, and National Counterterrorism Center; and in-person interviews by Homeland Security officers. To cease supporting refugee placements now would be cruel and inhumane given the numerous steps they've taken to get here. The simple truth is that refugees are not a threat to us; rather, they are the ones who are fleeing conditions of poverty, violence, and terror.

**We have the infrastructure to support them.** We support nonprofits like Siloam Family Health Center, Catholic Charities, Conexion Americas, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, Nashville International Center for Empowerment, The Nations Ministry Center and countless others that support refugees in their transition to life in Tennessee. They achieve remarkable outcomes related to health, language, education, professional development, and the community networks we all need to be successful residents and Tennesseans. **To learn more about this work, we would gladly host a meeting with these organization's leaders and their clients for you and your team.**

**Refugees positively impact the financial health of our state.** Over a 20-year period, refugees contribute, on average, \$21,000 more in taxes than the initial investment to resettle them. In 2015, refugees contributed \$21 billion in U.S. taxes. [Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees brought in \\$63 billion more in revenue over the past decade than their cost.](#)

Many industries, like hospitality and meatpacking, rely on refugee workers. Across the U.S., the low number of refugee arrivals is putting a strain on businesses, especially in rural areas. This is particularly

significant in Nashville and surrounding counties as Nashville's growing popularity as a tourist destination is increasingly reliant on the hospitality industry. It is also significant as the main employer in many rural communities, community hospitals, continue to close.

**Lives will be saved.** Matthew 2:13-18 tells us that Joseph, the father of Jesus, fled from Bethlehem with his family to Egypt to save the life of his son. Like Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, refugees are often fleeing violence and oppression that threatens their lives and livelihood. Continuing to provide a home in Tennessee for refugees will save the lives of our global citizens and is in line with the biblical mandate for us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

As a man of deep and personal faith, we urge you to continue the refugee resettlement program in Tennessee. If we can be of any assistance to you or your team with this or any other matter, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kindest regards,



Kristen Keely-Dinger, LPSW  
The Healing Trust



Rev. Kaki Friskics-Warren  
The Maddox Charitable Fund