



International Refugee  
Assistance Project

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 21, 2019

## CONTACT

Henrike Dessaulles, IRAP, [hdessaulles@refugeerights.org](mailto:hdessaulles@refugeerights.org), 516-838-1269

Mary Elizabeth Margolis, Church World Service, [memargolis@cwsglobal.org](mailto:memargolis@cwsglobal.org), 212-870-2188

Bill Swersey, HIAS, [bill.swersey@hias.org](mailto:bill.swersey@hias.org), 212-613-1349

Timothy Young, LIRS, [tyoung@lirs.org](mailto:tyoung@lirs.org), 443-257-6310

## FAITH-BASED REFUGEE HUMANITARIAN GROUPS FILE CHALLENGE TO TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S EXECUTIVE ORDER ALLOWING STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS TO BLOCK REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

*Church World Service, HIAS and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service are co-plaintiffs in new lawsuit*

(Greenbelt, MD) – Today, three refugee resettlement agencies, [Church World Service](#) (CWS), [HIAS](#) and [Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service](#) (LIRS), challenged President Trump's recent executive order giving state and local officials authority to block refugee resettlement in their jurisdictions. This unprecedented order could prevent refugees who have waited years from being reunited with their U.S.-based families, and communities from welcoming refugees, even if they have long-standing and successful resettlement programs.

A preliminary injunction motion will be filed in the coming days. The lawsuit charges that the order is yet another attempt by the Trump administration to dismantle the nearly 40-year-old federal resettlement infrastructure and restrict refugees from entering the United States. The new order, signed on September 26, would require resettlement agencies, including CWS, HIAS and LIRS, to obtain written consent from all localities and states in which they plan to resettle refugees. If written consent cannot be obtained, it could prevent refugees from being able to reunite with family, local faith communities from fulfilling their mission to welcome the stranger, and resettlement agencies from maintaining local affiliate offices that provide essential services to refugees already in the area.

According to the filed complaint, the executive order violates federal law, which requires federal agencies to make decisions about where refugees are to be placed within the United States according to a detailed list of factors, leaving no room for state and local governments to veto such decisions.

The plaintiffs in the case, CWS, HIAS, and LIRS, are among the nine agencies that partner with the State Department to serve refugees and uphold America's tradition of protecting those in need of safety. The defendants are President Trump; Secretary of State Mike Pompeo; Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar.



International Refugee  
Assistance Project

The plaintiffs are represented by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP). The complaint was filed in U.S. District Court in Maryland. A copy of the complaint is available [here](#).

A press call will be held on **Thursday, November 21, 2019**, at 1:30 pm EST.

**Dial in:** Dial toll-free within USA/Canada: **+1(866) 996-4427** or direct **+1(470) 495-9467**

Provide **Conference ID: 4826588** to the operator, state your name and affiliation and you will be placed into the meeting room where you will hear music until the call begins.

The following are quotes from:

**Melissa Keaney, Senior Litigation Staff Attorney, IRAP:** “We are bringing this lawsuit to stop the Administration's back-door attempt to decimate the refugee resettlement program. Communities across the United States stand ready to welcome refugees, including Americans who have been waiting years to reunite with family members. A single local politician should not be able to veto these displays of basic humanity.”

**Rev. John L. McCullough, President and CEO, CWS:** “This executive order is a thinly veiled attempt to play political games with the lives of the most vulnerable by enabling those who would keep refugee families apart and deny them access to critical services. Local support for newly arriving refugees in the communities where we work is already robust and clear. For more than 70 years, CWS has partnered with churches and faith communities across the nation to help refugee families successfully integrate into their communities and rebuild their lives in the United States. There is no justification for allowing local officials to shut down a proven program and block these faith communities from carrying out their mission to welcome the stranger.”

**Mark J. Hetfield, President and CEO, HIAS:** “It was not that long ago that Jews and African-Americans were banned from living in certain neighborhoods and towns. We fought to end that discrimination and humiliation. Now the Trump Administration has issued an executive order which allows states and localities to ban resettled refugees? We won't tolerate such intolerance. We are, once again, suing the federal government to end this unlawful and immoral state and local refugee ban. After all, Jewish tradition, and American tradition, compel us to welcome the stranger.”

**Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO, LIRS:** “Imagine coming to this country after years of violence, persecution and desperation, only to be told you cannot join your family because the state or city must clear new political hurdles in order to welcome you. Imagine being part of a welcoming community – where both the local economy and its cultural heritage are bolstered by the presence of refugees – only to have the door slammed shut by xenophobic and bureaucratic confusion. This dystopian vision could become our American reality if this unconstitutional executive order is allowed to stand. We will not allow this Administration to further endanger children and families by exploiting fears and stoking nationalism.”

**Faith leader: Rev. Jack Amick, Director of Global Migration at the United Methodist Committee on Relief**



International Refugee  
Assistance Project

“The executive order is ludicrous, arrogant, and inhibits our ability to freely practice our religion. As an ordained clergy person, I firmly believe that congregations will grow and be transformed in faith to the extent that they truly seek to welcome the stranger. As someone who spent two years of my civil service career at the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State, I know that this program of admitting highly vetted refugees into local American communities through congregational support makes amazing contributions to the economic and social fabric of the U.S. As the Director of Global Migration for UMCOR, I affirm that the United Methodist Church solidly supports the efforts of Church World Service and other resettlement agencies in seeking justice on this matter.”

###