

Litigation Background Statement

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U.S. religious congregations have a long history of supporting refugee resettlement in the U.S.; welcoming the stranger and caring for the most vulnerable among us is central to the teachings and practice of every world religion. Faith-based organizations account for seven of the nine non-governmental voluntary agencies that work with the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program of the Department of State on placement of all refugees entering the U.S.¹ The White House determines the number of refugees admitted to the U.S. each fiscal year and provides a budget to each voluntary agency according to the number of refugees they place. These nine agencies allocate placement of refugees through some 250 affiliate offices in 49 states. Each affiliate office is supported by volunteers in the local community, many of them faith-based organizations.

In response to the unprecedented crisis of more than twenty-two million refugees worldwide, President Obama increased the 2016 refugee cap of 85,000 to 110,000 for FY 2017 and some agencies responded to these projections by opening new offices, such as the affiliate office in Poughkeepsie, New York, which opened under the auspices of Church World Service (CWS) in January 2017. The Poughkeepsie affiliate office opened as a direct result of more than a year of advocacy by local faith communities, specifically Vassar Temple, Christ Episcopal Church, Masjid al-Noor Mosque and the Chaplain Service of Vassar College who felt driven by religious obligation to do more in response to the global refugee crisis. By December of 2016 the Mid-Hudson Refugee Solidarity Alliance (MHRSA) had formed and the faith-based membership expanded to twelve faith-based communities and two interfaith councils, including the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Rock Tavern (UUCRT) and the Greater Newburgh Interfaith Council (GNIC). CWS projected 80-100 refugees would be resettled within 50 miles of Poughkeepsie in FY 2017. In preparation to welcome these refugees, the MHRSA raised more than \$50,000 and mobilized hundreds of volunteers, all within the 50-mile resettlement range of Poughkeepsie. The UUCRT alone raised more than \$10,000 and, in partnership with GNIC, mobilized more than seventy volunteers from a dozen faith-based organizations.

However, the recent executive order reduces the number of refugees admitted to the U.S. for FY 2017 from 110,000 to 50,000 and, facing a reduction in refugees and federal dollars, CWS has reduced staff and determined that no refugees will be resettled in FY 2017 through the Poughkeepsie office and has admitted the future existence of the office is in jeopardy. If the office closes, then no refugees will be settled in the Hudson Valley through the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program. As the minister of the UUCRT, president of GNIC, and member of the steering committee of MHRSA, I bear witness to the harm this executive order has caused to the members of the UUCRT, the GNIC, and the MHRSA. Assisting refugees is vital to the free exercise of our religion, yet the executive order severely burdens our ability to do that, causing much moral pain.

¹ Church World Service (CWS); Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM); Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS); United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) World Relief Corporation (WR), a project of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Mid-Hudson Refugee Solidarity Alliance – Members (Dec 2016)

Local Congregations:

Vassar Temple
Christ Episcopal Church
Masjid al-Noor Mosque
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Rock Tavern
Shir Chadash
Freedom Plains Presbyterian Church
Temple Beth El
Reconstructionist Synagogue, New Paltz
Bruderhof
Beacon Hebrew Union Alliance
Church of the Messiah, Kingston

Colleges that are Members

Vassar College
Mount St Mary College
Bard College
SUNY New Paltz
SUNY, Dutchess County Community College
Marist College
Marist Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership
Culinary Institute (conversations are underway to join)

Community organizations

Dutchess County Interfaith Council
Greater Newburgh Interfaith Council
VFW Post 8645, New Paltz
Veterans for Peace Hudson Valley Chapter 177
Hudson Valley Chapter of the United Nations Association
Hudson Valley Chapter of Amnesty International
Rabbi Erwin Zimet Memorial Institute