

# REFUGEES ARE WELCOME HERE

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## OPPOSE SJR0467: THE ANTI-REFUGEE LAWSUIT

SJR0467 is one of the most extreme anti-refugee policies being debated in the country. For years, fringe anti-refugee and anti-Muslim groups have used our state legislature as a testing ground for extreme policies. This lawsuit is the latest in a multi-year campaign to create a hostile environment for immigrants and refugees in Tennessee. This resolution would **direct** the Attorney General to sue the federal government and challenge the long-standing refugee resettlement program. If the Attorney General refuses to sue, this resolution reserves the right for the General Assembly to hire outside counsel.

### WASTES TAXPAYER RESOURCES

The resolution purports to be a defense of Tennessee taxpayer resources by ensuring that the state has full control over investments and intentionally spends taxpayer resources. The resolution ignores the fact that the legislature has already asked and answered the question about whether refugees “cost” the state. A 2013 report by the fiscal review committee found that refugees and their families have contributed more than \$1.4 billion to the state, compared to only \$753 million spent in vesting in their integration and success. To suggest that Tennessee taxpayers would prefer to foot the bill for a lengthy and frivolous lawsuit, rather than invest in the integration and success of refugee families is insulting and disingenuous.

### UNWARRANTED & BASELESS

SJR0467 would lead to a lengthy and expensive lawsuit that would waste taxpayer resources by trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist. Governor Haslam recently stated that the state does have information on refugees. He told reporters, “It's public record. We get from the federal government the names of all the refugees that come in, where they're from, age, gender. And I don't think at this point in time this is something that's stressing our system” (1). In fact the Tennessee Offices of Refugees make this information available and accessible on their public website (2).

### MISGUIDED RESPONSE

In the December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 joint legislative hearing on refugee resettlement, legislators asked experts what the state could do in regards to refugee resettlement. David Shedd from the Heritage Foundation repeatedly stated, “The idea of assimilating them, and embracing them and welcoming them as much as possible, as quickly as possible, is absolutely critical. The best way to reduce the risk of terrorism is to assimilate refugees quickly. One of the lessons that we have learned, and that we should be very proud of as Americans, is that we welcome refugees and quickly integrate them into our communities. By and large as a society we do welcome them and want to see them progress and tens and tens of thousands have and contribute enormously to our economy and our society and our way of life. (3)”

### THREATENS OUR REPUTATION

At a time when our state is seeking new international investment and to retain high levels of tourism, it is unwise to pass extreme legislation like SJR0467. By suing the federal government over refugee resettlement, our state will appear intolerant, unwelcoming, and extreme. This resolution threatens our global reputation and will come at a high cost to the state.

### BETRAYS OUR VALUES

Tennessee and the United States have a proud history of welcoming refugees and serving as a beacon of hope to families across the world who are fleeing persecution and violence. SJR0467 seeks to shut the door on refugee families and undermines our values.

### CREATES A CLIMATE OF FEAR

This resolution and lawsuit do not exist in a vacuum. When our legislature debates the rights of refugees to live, learn, work, and worship in Tennessee, it creates a hostile climate for families. Because of the rhetoric at the state legislature, refugee families are being harassed and bullied. It is a failure of leadership for the General Assembly to advance the dangerous and inaccurate assumptions that refugee resettlement is a threat to our communities or that refugees are not fully contributing members of our community.



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Immigrant  
& Refugee  
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Lisa Sherman-Nikolaus | Policy Manager | [lisa@tnimmigrant.org](mailto:lisa@tnimmigrant.org) | 615-833-0384

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SJR0467 seeks to sue the federal government over the “cost” of refugees. The resolution ignores the fact that the legislature has already asked and answered the question about whether refugees “cost” the state. A 2013 report by the fiscal review committee found that refugees and their families have contributed more than \$1.4 billion to the state, compared to only \$753 million spent in vesting in their integration and success. Refugees demonstrate great courage, resilience, and perseverance and bring needed skills and entrepreneurial spirits to our communities. They add to our workforce, grow our tax base, and strengthen our economy.

# 61 YEARS

that faith and civic organizations across Tennessee have worked to welcome refugees and invest in their integration.

# \$15+ MILLION

of federal funding is invested annually in Tennessee through the refugee resettlement program.

# \$1.4 BILLION

contributed to the state coffers over the past two decades by refugees and their descendants (4).

# 81%

of employable adult refugees are employed within a year of resettlement.

# \$9.38

average hourly wage for refugees, 29% higher than the federal minimum wage

# 120 COMPANIES

Employed refugees in 2015, in many hard-to-fill labor roles—such as meatpacking, warehouses, processing plants, and in the hospitality industry.

(1) *Nashville Scene*, “Haslam Stops Grandstanding on Syrian Refugees,” February 17, 2016.

(2) See: Tennessee Office For Refugees Resources page at <http://bit.ly/1T1Gfz>

(3) David Shedd, “Refugee Assimilation is the Best Defense,” *The Tennessean*, December 11, 2015.

(4) Fiscal Review Committee, “A Study on the Federal Cost Shifting to the State of Tennessee as a Result of the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program For the period 1990-2012,” November 12, 2013.

The statistics above were collected from the Tennessee Office for Refugees.



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