

One Metropolitan Square
211 North Broadway, Suite 1300
St. Louis, MO 63102

phone 314.231.5555
fax 314.444.1122
www.stlregionalchamber.com



November 30, 2015

Hon. Tom Flanigan
Select Committee on Budget
Missouri House of Representatives
201 West Capitol Avenue, Room 309
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Chairman Flanigan,

The St. Louis Regional Chamber is driven by one overriding purpose – to inspire a greater St. Louis. Study after study shows that immigration to Missouri, including settlement of fully screened refugees, provides both an economic benefit and is in line with our core values as a nation. Being a welcoming community, particularly to those fleeing war and persecution, makes St. Louis stronger. We have been disappointed to observe some of our national leaders call for Congress to halt the entry of refugees, particularly Syrian refugees, to the United States. Similarly, we have been disappointed to hear some in Missouri call for refugees to be barred from settlement in our state. We ask that you continue to support efforts to ensure Missouri remains welcoming to those who want to come here to start a new life and contribute to our economy and society.

The economic benefits refugees bring to Missouri and to the St. Louis region are real and significant. Some examples include:

- Since 1999, resettled refugees have resulted in an estimated \$160 million in direct economic impact to the St. Louis region.
- In 2013 alone, the International Institute of St. Louis facilitated 415 job placements that earned an estimated \$9 million in labor income for the region, providing a total direct economic output (the value of industry production for these workers) of over \$90 million.
- In 2014, the Institute facilitated 556 placements with an average wage of \$8.68, resulting in just over \$450,000 in state tax revenue for these workers. More broadly, an estimated 10,000 adult refugees work in the St. Louis Region alone, which translates into millions in state tax revenue each year.

These economic benefits have been demonstrated in other states as well. A 2012 study of refugee costs and benefits in Cleveland found local refugee services agencies spent about \$4.8 million that year to help refugees get established in the area. The study found the positive economic impact those refugees had on the community was nearly \$48 million, roughly 10 times the initial resettlement costs.

Missouri has been blessed with a vibrant and growing entrepreneurial community. Multiple studies on refugees have found that they are more likely to be entrepreneurs and enjoy higher rates of successful business ventures compared to native-born. In addition refugees increase demand for goods and services in local markets and can be particularly beneficial to communities that have declining populations, such as the City of St. Louis. We have a recent example of such a strong, vibrant refugee community with as many as 50,000 Bosnian-Americans who have started families, created jobs and contributed to economic growth right here in St. Louis.

As Americans we have long prided ourselves for being the refuge of those fleeing tyranny or oppression. While the Statue of Liberty may not have initially been sculpted as a symbol of immigration, the plaque mounted on the Statue's base confirms our century-old invitation to the less fortunate with its line "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore."

Turning our back on refugees betrays our core values as a welcoming, diverse community that benefits from the contributions of all our immigrants. It sends the wrong message that Missouri is making judgments about people based on their religion or country of origin. President Reagan saw our country in much the same way, as "a tall proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, wind-swept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace, a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here."

We can welcome refugees while keeping our families and communities safe. Refugees are the most thoroughly screened group of people who come to the United States, with background checks and security screenings including the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the Pentagon and multiple intelligence agencies. Federal officials interview each refugee to determine whether they are true refugees and whether they are admissible to the United States. They then undergo a series of biometric and background checks, which is compared against government databases. This process typically takes more than two years before the refugee would arrive in the U.S.

Our country is at its finest when it provides the example for other nations to follow. Our openhearted and inclusive spirit, especially when welcoming refugees fleeing war and persecution, should continue to be an example for the world. We ask that you continue to support robust refugee assistance programs in Missouri.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Joe Reagan
President & CEO