



November 20, 2015

Member Organizations

*Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
Bluebonnet Area
Coastal Plains Area
Trinity-Brazos Area
Southwest Region*

*Episcopal Church
Episcopal Diocese of West Texas*

*Evangelical Lutheran Church
in America
Northern Texas-Northern
Louisiana Synod
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Southwestern Texas Synod*

*Presbyterian Church (USA)
Grace Presbytery
Mission Presbytery
Palo Duro Presbytery*

*Society of Friends
South Central Yearly Meeting*

*United Church of Christ
South Central Conference*

*United Methodist Church
Central Texas Conference
North Texas Conference
Northwest Texas Conference
Rio Texas Conference
Texas Conference
United Methodist Women*

*Church Women United
CitySquare
Interfaith Action of Central Texas
Islamic Circle of North America
Jewish Federation of Dallas
National Council of Jewish Women
Tarrant Area Community of
Churches
Texas Muslim Women's
Foundation
Union Baptist Fellowship*

*Bee Moorhead
Executive Director*

Commissioner Chris Traylor
Texas Health and Human Services Commission
4900 North Lamar, Austin, Texas 78751

Dear Commissioner Traylor,

On behalf of Texas Impact's board of directors, I am writing to express shock and dismay regarding your letter to local refugee resettlement agencies. In your letter, you direct these agencies to inform HHSC of any information they have relating to potential or planned resettlement of Syrian refugees in Texas, and to refuse to participate in such resettlement. You require the agencies to respond by 4pm on Friday, November 20.

HHSC's action constitutes an unprecedented attempt on the part of a state agency to pressure private, nonprofit organizations to violate federal law and their federal contractual obligations.

In your letter, you reference 8 U.S. Code § 1522(a)(1)(B)(iii). This section of the law states: "local voluntary agency activities *should be* conducted in close cooperation and advance consultation with state and local governments."

However, the activities which local agencies are conducting "in close cooperation and advance consultation with [the] state" are required under 8 U.S. Code § 1522 Sec. 6 to "meet standards, goals, and priorities, developed by the Director, which assure the effective resettlement of refugees and which promote their economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible and the efficient provision of services."

8 U.S. Code § 1522 Sec. 5 requires that "Assistance and services funded under this section *shall be* provided to refugees without regard to race, religion, nationality, sex, or political opinion."

Plainly, HHSC is demanding that local resettlement agencies violate federal law by engaging in illegal discrimination. Furthermore, the letter hints that failure to violate federal laws and contractual obligations could impact their receipt of future allocations of federal funds from HHSC. We cannot imagine how any organization could contemplate complying with HHSC's directive without first obtaining legal counsel.

We request in the strongest terms that HHSC convene a meeting with representatives of the organizations that received the letter, the leaders of their respective faith traditions, their attorneys, and the appropriate federal authorities to clarify HHSC's authority to issue such a directive and the meaning of the statement that the agency's review of the Refugee Resettlement State Plan "could result in an amendment to your local contract."

Texas Impact stands ready to assist HHSC in convening such a meeting as soon as possible, including reaching out to the necessary religious leaders and denominational attorneys. Please let me know if I can provide you with any additional information.

Sincerely,

Bee Moorhead

Cc: Hon. Greg Abbott; Hon. Dan Patrick ; Hon. Joe Straus; Rev. Dr. Whit Bodman