



March 21, 2022

Dear Governor Youngkin:

As 28 organizations serving Virginia's communities, including 21 Virginia-based organizations and resettlement agencies, we look forward to working with your administration to strengthen refugee integration into the Virginia workforce.

Refugee resettlement agencies and our organizational partners have proudly served displaced and persecuted people arriving in Virginia for decades. Resettlement agencies provide case management services - including but not limited to securing housing and identifying employment opportunities, enrollment in English language courses, and school enrollment for children. This work would not be possible without the vast support of the state and community support networks, and the hundreds of volunteers across Virginia who dedicate their time, energy and resources to welcome newly arrived refugees.

Refugees are eager to build their new lives here in Virginia and their resilience is a testament to the warm welcome extended by their fellow Virginians. Refugees are individuals who have been forced to flee their home country due to persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. More than that, they are neighbors, coworkers, community leaders, and even teachers.

This year, the General Assembly passed [SB 68](#) / [HB 979](#), important legislation that strengthens refugee integration in Virginia and helps them continue to thrive. We encourage you to swiftly sign the legislation into law. This legislation creates a provisional teacher licensure for teachers licensed or certified to teach outside of the United States and addresses the underutilization of refugee talent to strengthen our education system.

Virginia is currently facing a critical shortage of educators in schools throughout the state. The VA Department of Education has taken bold steps to recruit and retain new teachers. We encourage you to see this measure as complementary to those efforts - in tapping into the talent that already exists within the state.

We are a country with a proud legacy of [refugees](#) and [immigrants](#) who helped found this nation, and we recognize the valuable contributions they bring to Virginia communities and the economy. This legislation seeks to further that legacy and engender our core values of generosity, hospitality, and welcome so that newcomers can achieve their American dream..

Refugees are beloved members of our communities and vital to their prosperity. However, many refugees remain unable to fully contribute their talents to the workforce because of systemic barriers, including the lack of recognition of their international education and experience, outdated occupational and professional re-credentialing processes, and insufficient access to meaningful workforce development and adult education services. We also know that Virginia teacher shortages [spiked](#) during the COVID pandemic, and new Americans are in a position to help.

Virginians have long recognized that refugees are vital to the continuing prosperity of our communities – they pay taxes, help grow our economy, and bring unique skill sets, experiences, and insights. In [2015 alone](#), nearly 87,000 refugees living in the commonwealth paid \$964 million in national, state, and local taxes, and held \$2.5 billion in spending power. In Alexandria, VA, refugees make up more than [one out of](#)

[every 10 self-employed entrepreneurs](#). While the economic contributions of refugees are impressive, their incredible degree of upward mobility truly stands out. This legislation helps foster that upward mobility.

We urge you to sign this legislation into law and demonstrate moral leadership around the imperative to love our neighbor, welcome the immigrant, and care for the most vulnerable among us.

Sincerely,

Virginia Organizations

Church World Service (CWS) Virginia
IRC Virginia
Virginia United Methodist Church.
Virginia Organizing
Just Neighbors Ministry
Edu-Futuro
CASA in Virginia
Edu-Futuro
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)
JAMAAT - Jews and Muslims and Allies Acting Together
ACLU People Power Fairfax
LUCHA Ministries, INC
Progress Virginia
Virginia Civic Engagement Table
Virginia Coalition for Immigrant Rights
BOVA Friends of Refugees
Wellspring UCC
Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce
Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations
The Dream Project
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy

National Organizations with Virginia Presence

International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
African Communities Together
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship
Berrien Immigrant Solidarity Network
World Education Services
New Federation of Asian American United Methodists
Japanese American Citizens League