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West Michigan Businesses Urge the U.S. Government to Support Refugee Resettlement

The businesses partner with Bethany's Refugee Employment Program

Grand Rapids, August 27, 2019 — Employers in West Michigan are encouraging the U.S. State Department to support refugee resettlement in response to recent reports that the U.S. government is considering zeroing out the lifesaving program in fiscal year 2020.

36 employers of all sizes and across industries have signed a letter in support of the contributions refugees have made to the local workforce. The businesses are part of a network of roughly 500 employers who partner with Bethany's Refugee Employment Program.

“Stopping the resettlement of refugees would be an incredible loss to West Michigan communities,” said Chris Palusky, Bethany's President & CEO. “These are hardworking men and women with unique skills sought after by employers. Since 2009, local businesses have hired over 5,000 refugees in partnership with Bethany and they are asking to hire more. Refugees work hard, start businesses, and give back to their neighborhoods. West Michigan has benefited greatly as a welcoming community for refugees.”

In 2018, Bethany's Refugee Employment Program placed 349 refugees with over 100 employers, a sharp decline from past years because fewer refugees have been permitted in the U.S. Collectively, they earned roughly \$9 million, less than half of what was earned and contributed to the local economy in 2017.

“Grand Rapids has experienced tremendous economic growth over the past decade and embracing refugees has certainly played a role in the area's development,” said Andy Johnston, Vice President of Government Affairs at the Grand Rapids Chamber. “By continuing to welcome refugees, our community can be further enriched by the unique culture, knowledge, and skills they bring to our businesses and neighborhoods. West Michigan employers want to continue hiring refugees.”

Bethany has helped refugees resettle for over 40 years, including working alongside nearly 650 refugees in 2018. We view the refugee and immigration crisis through the eyes of those seeking refuge from persecution and believe America should be that place of refuge.

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About Bethany

Bethany is a global nonprofit that supports children and families with world-class social services, all designed to help families thrive. Over 75 years ago, we began our work by serving a single child. Today, we work in more than 30 states and more than a dozen countries worldwide, serving more than 50,000 people every year.