



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Sean M. Ryan

Senator Sean Ryan Urges Biden Administration to Act Quickly To Rejoin The World Community and Restore A Robust Refugee Resettlement Program

SEAN M. RYAN January 21, 2021

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PROGRAM**

President Biden Has Committed To Increasing Refugee Admissions Beyond Obama-Era Levels – Ryan Urges Quick Action To Restore Refugee Programs To Boost Upstate New York Economy

BUFFALO – Today, January 21, 2021, New York State Senator Sean Ryan urged the Biden Administration to act quickly to rejoin the world community and restore a robust refugee resettlement program. President Biden has committed to restoring annual refugee admissions beyond the 2017 level set by President Obama to 125,000 per year. Senator Ryan is urging the Biden Administration to follow through on the commitment as quickly as possible in an effort to boost the Upstate New York economy and Upstate cities like Buffalo, which have greatly benefited from refugee resettlement. 94% of refugees coming into New York settle in Upstate communities. Since 2002, more than 16,000 refugees have come to the City of Buffalo, with thousands more settling in places such as Utica, Syracuse, and Rochester. Refugees have helped to stem population losses in Upstate New York communities, and have contributed to economic growth by opening small businesses and employing local workers.

As he prepared to leave office in 2017, President Obama set a goal of 110,000 refugee admissions for the year ahead. When President Trump took office, he began to drastically cut refugee admissions, threatening the economic progress of cities across Upstate New York. By 2018, President Trump had capped refugee resettlements at 45,000. In 2019, it was 30,000, and down to 18,000 in 2020 – the lowest number of admissions since the establishment of the current United Nations refugee resettlement program. This systematic lowering of refugee admissions has hit upstate communities hard. With a new administration in office, Senator Ryan wants to quickly restore the cuts made over the last four years, and welcome more refugees to the City of Buffalo and communities across Upstate New York.

Senator Sean Ryan said “There is no doubt that we face immense challenges in the months and years ahead. President Biden has pledged to get the pandemic under control and effectively manage the distribution of a vaccine that will end this crisis once and for all. As plans to end the pandemic and boost the economy take shape, we must also look toward important ways in which our nation can continue to heal after a Trump presidency which saw the most divisive rhetoric aimed squarely at immigrants and refugees. The previous administration worked tirelessly to tell immigrants and refugees that they were not welcome in America. Here in New York, we know that diversity is a strength, and immigrants and refugees contribute to the vibrancy of our communities. Now is the time to reverse course, and welcome more refugees back to Buffalo and communities across our great state.”

Senator Ryan is also making a push to increase funding for refugee resettlement agencies in the New York State budget. While serving the State Assembly, Senator Ryan led the push to create the New York State Enhanced Services to Refugees Program in the state budget. Funding from this program has helped to support New York’s 14 refugee resettlement agencies, which have faced funding gaps because of the Trump Administration’s cuts to refugee admissions. Senator Ryan wants the program to be funded at \$5 million per year, instead of \$1 million that was included in last year’s budget. It is estimated that Buffalo lost out on over 8,000 refugee admissions in the last four years.

Eva Hassett, Executive Director International Institute said “The Biden administration will be setting a new agenda and tone for our country. As we have for the past 100 years, we look forward to working alongside federal, state, and local partners to ensure the foreign-born have access to critical services and assistance, are free to pursue opportunities for advancement, and are welcomed and celebrated in our community. Refugees have made and continue to make extraordinary contributions to our communities and data shows that refugees provide an economic boon to their communities in addition to enhancing the

diversity and vibrancy of the places we call home. As New York state grapples with an anticipated \$15 billion budget deficit, we encourage state lawmakers to remember the foreign born Western New Yorkers contribute nearly \$630 million in taxes and control \$1.4 billion in spending power each year. Now more than ever we must invest in growing a community which provides such vital support to our economy. We call on New York State to continue to renew the vital NYSESRP funding which equips resettlement agencies across the state with the capacity needed to ensure that New York is the destination of choice for immigrants and refugees.”

Karen M. Andolina Scott, Executive Director at Journey’s End Refugee Services says, “If the past four years have taught us anything, it is that hateful rhetoric combined with xenophobic policies dehumanize our foreign-born friends and neighbors and put them in danger. While the federal government took every opportunity to halt immigration and to separate and incarcerate those seeking refuge, foreign-born populations once again show us how they are the backbone of our economy, continuing to work and serve as essential members of our WNY community throughout the COVID-19 crisis. We at Journey’s End welcome President Biden and his administration, who promise to work towards securing the rights of immigrants and refugees. We look forward to continuing our work with NYS officials and agencies, who recognize that our state owes its vitality to foreign-born populations. Our mission guides us to welcome our newest neighbors and to help ease their transition into their new lives. It is compulsory for all levels of our government to not only protect immigrants and refugees, but to provide the needed resources to integrate immigrants and refugees into our society as equals.”

Dr. Molly S. Short Carr, Chief Executive Officer of Jewish Family Services of Western New York said “Jewish Family Services of Western New York is looking forward to working with our partners throughout the country in rebuilding the infrastructure for refugee resettlement under the Biden administration. Western New York has a long history of welcoming refugees

with open hearts and minds. Over the last four years, we have seen the decline in refugees as a loss to our communal well-being. Now, we have an opportunity to refresh and renew resettlement here in Western New York and to explore ways we can better support our refugee communities. JFS looks forward to working with our public and private partners to ensure Western New York continues to be a premiere resettlement community.”

Deacon Steve Schumer, President and Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Charities of Buffalo, said: “With the change in the Presidential Administration, Catholic Charities anticipates the ability very soon to ‘welcome the stranger’ in increased numbers, as we are called to do. We are ready to rebuild the infrastructure to support and reassure those who are immigrants and refugees. In fact, we are prepared to pick up where we left off four years ago. While our light never went out, few refugees who deserved to start a new life free from fear and repercussion could reach our beacon of hope. We look forward to working with New York State and all of the partners who strive to strengthen Buffalo and Western New York for – and through the efforts of – resettled immigrants and refugees.”

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