

## SHELTERING SYRIAN CHILDREN IN AMERICA ACT

### Summary:

Congress should consider a bill that would authorize 25,000 Syrian children, ages 3 to 10, to temporarily live in the US until the civil war in that country ends. These children will be chosen by their families and live in the homes of American families who will volunteer to host them. The costs of the care will be covered by the host families themselves or by the charitable organizations that have passed all the appropriate security checks and are already active in refugee resettlement. Previous such programs for unaccompanied children have been a great success in the past, such as Operation Peter Pan for Cuban children, which began in 1960 and Kindertransport, for Jewish children fleeing to the UK from 1938 to 1940.

### Rationale:

The US has provided fewer safe havens for Syrian asylum seekers than many smaller countries with more limited resources. Although there are valid security reasons for wanting to limit flows of migration, it is possible to distinguish subsets of asylum-seekers who pose no security risk. Specifically, admitting children ages 3-10 years old will contribute dramatically to alleviating the humanitarian crisis in Syria, show that ours is a compassionate country, and that Congress can act to alleviate suffering without jeopardizing homeland security.

### Details:

A. Congress will authorize the Department of State to issue 25,000 temporary visas for Syrian children ages 3 to 10. These visas will expire six months after the Secretaries of Defense and State determine that hostilities have ceased and a durable peace process has begun. (The grace period is suggested to allow time for the families of the children to re-establish their households in Syria before the children return).

B. The Department of State, together with Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services will be in charge of the inflow and return of these children. They are to be brought by their parents or relatives to US embassies and consulates in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, or Iraq. Parents or relatives will indicate at this point who will be authorized to take charge of their returning children in case the parents or guardians perish during the war, or alternatively, if the parents wish for their children to be available for adoption in such an event.

C. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within HHS will be in charge of working with voluntary associations such as those associated with Islamic Relief USA, other religious charities, and child advocacy organizations to place these children a) among host families that have volunteered to house them, or b) into the foster care for unaccompanied refugee minors already approved by the ORR.

D. States that agree to participate in this Save the Children program will be asked to determine that there are no people in the state's sexual offender registries in the hosting households.

E. State and Defense will determine when conditions in Syria permit the return of the children to their homes. Specifically, the Secretaries of State and Defense must determine not only that hostilities have subsided, but that there is a viable plan in place for restoring order, and that all parties have demonstrated commitment to implementing said plan.

Precedents:

**Operation Peter Pan:** a large number of unaccompanied Cuban minors were brought to the United States between 1960 and 1962. The program was created by the Catholic Welfare Bureau. Initially, the children were required to have a visa in order to enter the United States. However, on January 3, 1962, the US Department of State announced that Cuban minors no longer needed such visas. Several major American corporations helped finance the accommodation of these children. One of them was Mel Martinez, who grew up to become a US Senator and the first Latino chairman of the Republican Party.

**Kindertransport:** In 1938, while the Nazis were already shipping tens of thousands of Jews to concentration camps, they allowed Jewish children to emigrate if others overseas would take them in. The actions taken by British citizens to shelter these Jewish children from 1938 to 1940 were informally known as the Kindertransport (Children's Transport in German). Great Britain took in thousands of children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia with the understanding that the children return to their homes after the war was finished.

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