

# *The Greater Tulsa Area Hispanic Affairs Commission*

Official Statement

## **Syrian Refugees Crisis**

November 19, 2015

Tulsa, Oklahoma – In light of statements issued by municipal, state and federal elected officials, we, the Greater Tulsa Area Hispanic Affairs Commission, feel impelled to share our position about the Syrian refugees crisis.

In the United States, we do not give out the title of refugee lightly. Never have. Unlike what we may be seeing in media reports about refugee processing in some European countries, our country has a stringent and extremely thorough (excruciatingly long) refugee processing system. None of this has changed. Refugee status is a status of last resort, meant to protect the absolute most vulnerable.

Stating that we will welcome up to 10,000 Syrian refugees into the United States does not mean that we are doing this overnight. According to the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), the average time from the initial referral to arrival as a refugee in the United States is about 18-24 months. Also, the process to come as a refugee is one of the most stringent processes in our country, refugee applicants are processed through the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI's Terrorist Screening Center, and the Departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security. Refugees from Syria are then subject to additional screening that looks at where they came from and what caused them to flee their home, stories that are checked out. All of this occurs before a refugee is allowed to set foot in the country.

We are very concerned that local elected officials are uninformed. Again, the process currently in place is rigorous and lengthy. It includes thorough background and security checks. Protecting people from terrorism, persecution and violence is a human rights issue that aligns with our most fundamental values. We remind you that our city leadership just last June declared Tulsa a “Compassionate City”.

We concur with Tulsa-born writer Denver Nicks in his piece posted Nov. 18 on the [Huffington Post](#):

“Amid this global humanitarian crisis we ask you for leadership, not fear. We are a nation of refugees, a people shaped by desperation. It's understandable if we've forgotten what desperation feels like. But it will be unforgivable if we forget how to extend compassion--even in the face of terror--to those who haven't.”

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