

FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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MICHAEL B. SHEEDY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



December 2, 2015

The Honorable Rick Scott
Governor of Florida
Plaza Level 05, The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

Re: Refugee Services for Syrians

Dear Governor Scott,

In collaboration with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS) several of our Catholic Charities in Florida work hard to welcome refugees to our state. We have long appreciated our public-private partnership that includes not only the federal government, but also the state government, under your leadership. Time and again the refugee program has not only protected refugees but often helped to revitalize communities in our state.

We share your deep concern about recent attacks in Paris by ISIS. My fellow bishops and I have joined with the people of dioceses to mourn with our French sisters and brothers, and we have offered our deepest condolences for their losses. We know that you have, as well.

The violence in Paris provides us a brief, horrific glance at the kind of senseless violence that ISIS and other persecutors have committed against the Syrian population since March of 2011, which has caused more than 4 million Syrians to flee as refugees. As we see the victims in Paris, we recall ISIS' victims from Syria who have suffered the same brutality and who seek to come to the United States for protection and a new life. These refugees, including Christians and other religious minorities, are fleeing terror and violence such as we witnessed in Paris. They are extremely vulnerable families, women, and children who are fleeing for their lives.

Granted, when we see the victims in Paris, we are also reminded that we must be vigilant against ISIS. The violence reminds us that we need to have rigorous, secure screening of the people coming into our country. The refugee screening program has such rigor. Refugees coming to this country must pass security checks and multiple interviews before entering the United States—more than any arrival to the United States. It takes from 18-24 months for a refugee to pass through the whole vetting process.

While supporting rigor, we disagree with the call for an end to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in the United States. We believe that it would be a grave injustice for these vulnerable, carefully-vetted refugees to be blamed and to be denied resettlement for the actions of a terrorist organization. We can support the strengthening of the already stringent screening program, but we should continue to welcome those in desperate need.

We look forward to being in ongoing dialogue about this matter and to continue our important public-private partnership for the common good of our communities and our state.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in green ink. It begins with a small cross symbol, followed by a stylized 'T' and 'G' that are connected to the first part of the name 'Wenski'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski, D.D.
Archbishop of Miami and
President, Florida Conference of Catholic Bishops

cc: Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane, D.D., Bishop of Venice and Moderator, Catholic Charities
Michael Sheedy