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**Statement from Aaron Rippenkroeger, CEO of Refugee Services of Texas, on Gov. Abbott's Announcement Seeking to Withdraw Texas from the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program After Nearly 40 Years of Compassionate Welcome of Refugees**

Refugee Services of Texas is deeply disappointed by Gov. Abbott's announcement seeking to withdraw the State of Texas from its role in the U.S. refugee admissions program after nearly 40 years of participation, especially at a time in our history when Texas' compassionate legacy of welcoming refugees seeking safety from violence and oppression is needed more than ever.

The world community is now witnessing the highest level of forced migration on record. More than 65 million people have been torn from their homes and forced to flee war, persecution and instability. Texas is playing a significant role in helping alleviate the worst humanitarian crisis of our generation by providing assistance for refugees, asylees, survivors of human trafficking and related vulnerable populations —75 percent of whom are women and children.

Texas' integration program, efforts and experience in the resettlement of refugees serve as an international model of success, resulting in the fastest and highest levels of self-sufficiency for those involved. To suggest otherwise is untrue and irresponsible.

Providing security and refuge are not mutually exclusive objectives. Texas has accomplished both objectives for decades. Refugees remain the most scrutinized group of people who come to the U.S., having successfully undergone 20 layers and two years-plus of security checks and clearances, including extensive in-person interviews, biography mapping, biometric analyses, fingerprinting and other security measures.

We agree with Pope Francis who said last week that authentic hospitality is *"our greatest security against hateful acts of terrorism."*

Ending the state's support for the refugee assistance program is a departure from historic Texas values, from our shared principles of human decency and constitutes, for many of our volunteers and others, a rejection of the religious belief to serve the needy and vulnerable, including refugees.

With the U.S. accepting less than one percent of the world's refugees, Texas and the nation has enormous capacity to welcome more refugees, and this latest step by Gov. Abbott fails to recognize all that we have achieved and that which we can still do.



Working together, Texans from all walks of life will work diligently to create a new refugee service structure independent of the State of Texas to ensure that the most vulnerable and needy among us receive the welcome and support that they deserve, that demonstrates our true capacity as a state and a nation and that makes us all safer and prouder in the long run.

About Refugee Services of Texas:

Founded in 1978, Refugee Services of Texas (RST) is a non-profit social service agency dedicated to providing services to refugees and other displaced persons fleeing persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, and/or political opinion and also to the communities that welcome them. RST provides services to hundreds of refugees, asylees, survivors of human trafficking and related vulnerable populations from over thirty different countries of origin each year via service centers located in Amarillo, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston.