

AILA Welcomes Legislation Designed to Protect Refugees

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Today, the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) welcomed the introduction of the Refugee Protection Act of 2016 in both the House and Senate, which includes provisions to address many of the severe, longstanding problems in the U.S. refugee and asylum systems. AILA commends Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), who led this vitally important work along with their colleagues.

"It has been more than thirty years since Congress passed the bipartisan Refugee Act of 1980, in recognition of our commitment to protect those fleeing persecution," said William A. Stock, AILA President. He continued, "Over the past three decades, differing interpretations of new laws and policies have resulted in the denial of protection to refugees despite what our nation's fundamental values require. This bill would go a long way to rebalance the scales." Among other things, the Refugee Protection Act would:

- Eliminate the one-year asylum filing deadline that unjustly bars thousands of individuals who need protection from seeking relief;
- Make the system more fundamentally fair by appointing counsel for children, victims of violence, and other vulnerable populations;
- Improve border screening protocols by allowing child welfare professionals to assist in the interviewing of children;
- Bolster the integrity of the system by increasing the availability of legal orientation programs and requiring quality control mechanisms during screening processes; and,
- Strengthen due process by providing asylum seekers a more meaningful opportunity to substantiate their claims in court and to clarify inconsistencies in the record.

Benjamin Johnson, AILA's Executive Director noted, "This bill is a true reflection and affirmation of America as a country with a proud history of welcoming refugees from around the world - a truth that has been obscured by the harsh anti-refugee rhetoric that has been heard far too often in recent months. With the lives of those fleeing persecution on the line, it is time for the U.S. to reclaim its role as the beacon of hope to the world."

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The American Immigration Lawyers Association is the national association of immigration lawyers established to promote justice, advocate for fair and reasonable immigration law and policy, advance the quality of immigration and nationality law and practice, and enhance the professional development of its members.