

19103962D

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 720

Offered January 16, 2019

Designating June 20, in 2019 and in each succeeding year, as World Refugee Day in Virginia.

Patrons—Rodman, Adams, D.M., Aird, Ayala, Bagby, Bell, John J., Bourne, Bulova, Carr, Carroll Foy, Carter, Convirs-Fowler, Filler-Corn, Guzman, Hayes, Herring, Hope, Hurst, James, Jones, J.C., Keam, Kory, Krizek, Levine, Lopez, McQuinn, Mullin, Murphy, Plum, Price, Rasoul, Roem, Sickles, Simon, Sullivan, Torian, Toscano, Tran, Turpin, Tyler, VanValkenburg, Ward and Watts

Referred to Committee on Rules

WHEREAS, as of 2018, there were more than 20 million refugees throughout the world, people displaced from their home country who are unwilling or unable to return due to a fear of persecution based on race, nationality, or religion; and

WHEREAS, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide; and

WHEREAS, the UNHCR reports that there are more refugees in the world today than at any time since World War II and that approximately half of the world's refugees are children; and

WHEREAS, the UNHCR has determined that 1.19 million refugees are in need of immediate resettlement and that these refugees include torture survivors, people with severe medical conditions, LGBTQ individuals, orphaned children, and women at risk of gender-based violence, all of whom cannot return to their homeland and cannot stay in their host country due to their extreme vulnerability; and

WHEREAS, according to the United Nations, every minute 24 people are fleeing terror, persecution, armed conflicts, and human rights abuses in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central America, and other regions around the world; and

WHEREAS, Amnesty International reports that more than half of the world's refugees are hosted by only 10 countries, many of which have inadequate resources to keep refugees fed, housed, or safe, leaving some refugees to survive on less than 50 cents a day; and

WHEREAS, the United States participates in a resettlement program that is critical to global humanitarian efforts and reflects America's finest values, strengthens global security, and alleviates some of the burden placed on front-line host countries; and

WHEREAS, refugees that enter the United States are among the most vetted travelers to enter this country and are subject to extensive screening checks, including in-person interviews, biometric data checks, and multiple interagency checks; and

WHEREAS, once they settle in the United States, refugees contribute to their communities by starting businesses, paying taxes, and sharing their cultural traditions; these new residents are workers, students, entrepreneurs, parents, neighbors, and community leaders who contribute more than they consume in state-funded services, including schooling and health care; and

WHEREAS, Virginia has been and continues to be a welcoming home to a diverse population of refugees and immigrants who add to the economic strength and cultural richness of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, since 2013, Virginia has resettled more than 7,400 refugees from Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Colombia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, and other countries; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Social Services' Office of Newcomer Services is responsible for administering the Commonwealth's Refugee Resettlement Program and works with other state agencies, faith communities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to help individuals and families gain economic self-sufficiency and achieve social integration; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly designate June 20, in 2019 and in each succeeding year, as World Refugee Day in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates transmit a copy of this resolution to the Virginia Department of Social Services' Office of Newcomer Services so that the agency may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates post the designation of this day on the General Assembly's website.