

**Statement of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service  
Submitted to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary for the May 19, 2010  
Hearing: “Refugee Protection Act of 2010”**

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) applauds the introduction of the Refugee Protection Act of 2010 (S. 3113) and calls on all members of Congress to support this important legislation. Introduced by Senator Leahy (D-VT) and co-sponsored by Senators Levin (D-MI), Durbin (D-IL), Akaka (D-HI) and Burris (D-IL), the bill would ensure that the United States continues to uphold its commitment to protecting refugees, asylum seekers, children and other vulnerable migrants who arrive on U.S. shores in search of protection.

The Refugee Protection Act of 2010 would ensure a proper welcome for refugees arriving to the United States from overseas. The bill would regularly update a per capita grant that provides refugees with financial and case management support as they begin to rebuild their lives in the United States. LIRS assists thousands of refugees every year, resettling to the United States in fiscal year 2009 nearly 11,000 refugees. In a 2009 report, *The Real Cost of Welcome: A Financial Analysis of Local Refugee Reception*, LIRS drew attention to the need for increasing the per capita grant. In January 2010, the government announced it would double the per capita grant. While the per capita grant increase is a welcome step, the bill would require that the grant keep pace with cost of living and inflation increases.

The legislation would also help protect family unity for separated children. When in the best interests of the children, the bill would allow migrant children who have been separated from their parents to reunify with refugee family or friends who have been acting as their caregivers. LIRS provides specialized foster care services for refugee children and places unaccompanied minors with licensed and trained foster families. LIRS recognizes the significant challenges children face when separated from their parents and supports the inclusion of this provision as it would ensure that vulnerable migrant children continue to receive the loving care they need.

Finally, the Refugee Protection Act of 2010 calls for much needed reforms to the immigration detention system. The bill would expand cost effective alternative to detention programs to asylum seekers and would provide released individuals with case management services and referrals to community-based legal and social service providers. It would also require that migrants who must be detained have access to counsel, medical care, religious practice, and visits from family. In fiscal year 2009, the federal government incarcerated over 380,000 immigrants. In fiscal year 2011, the federal government plans to spend nearly \$2 billion to detain 430,000 immigrants. For many years, LIRS has raised concerns about government reliance on the use of immigration detention and called for the expansion of alternative to detention programs that ensure the appearance of released individuals at their immigration proceedings. In February 2007, LIRS released a joint report, *Locking Up Family Values*, which highlighted the

imprisonment of families and recommended the release of asylum seekers who do not present a flight risk or pose a threat to the community. The detention reforms included in the bill are a welcome step towards ensuring fairness, dignity and respect for all who arrive to the United States.

Since 1939, LIRS has assisted and advocated on behalf of refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, migrants in detention, families fractured by migration and other vulnerable populations. LIRS is the national agency established by Lutheran church bodies in the United States to carry out the churches' ministry with uprooted people and provides services to migrants and refugees through over 60 legal and social service partners. LIRS is a cooperative agency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, whose members comprise over 7 million congregants nationwide.

If you have questions about this statement, please contact Eric B. Sigmon, Interim Director for LIRS Washington Office, 202/626-7943, [esigmon@lirs.org](mailto:esigmon@lirs.org).

The LIRS news release on the refugee per capita grant can be found here:  
<http://www.lirs.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=nhLPJ0PMKuG&b=5544305&ct=7872763>

The joint LIRS family detention report, *Locking Up Family Values*, can be found here:  
<http://www.lirs.org/atf/cf/%7Ba9ddba5e-c6b5-4c63-89de-91d2f09a28ca%7D/LOCKINGUPFAMILYVALUES.PDF>