



Legislation Text

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Honoring the Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary project for its work in providing Philadelphia-based Iraqi and Syrian residents a space to explore and share their experiences of migration, resilience, and refuge through the arts.

WHEREAS, From 2018 to 2019, the Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary Project enabled local Syrians and Iraqis to work with commissioned artists, writers, and illustrators to create handmade books that explore connections between history and experience, displacement and refuge, empathy and belonging. Resettled Syrians and Iraqis now living in Philadelphia developed their printing, binding, and other artistic techniques through a series of workshops that took place across the City of Philadelphia. These workshops served as a space to share personal stories, build understanding, and increase empathy; and

WHEREAS, The Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary Project initially supported five book artists and fifteen Syrian and Iraqi refugees in creating book arts of people's stories and experiences weaved with archival materials in the Swarthmore College Libraries. It also engaged at least ten other artists, fifteen translators, five other participants, as well as many Swarthmore College students, faculty and staff, and Philadelphians. Artists conducted a series of workshops, interviews, and gatherings with project collaborators that contributed to many collaborative and individual works of art. The final artworks are currently on display: *Friends* at Twelve Gates Arts, *Peace* at Parkway Central Free Library, and *Sanctuary* at City Hall; and

WHEREAS, Five artists-Islam Aly, Maureen Cummins, Erik Ruin, Courtney Bowles and Mark Strandquist-were commissioned to create new works emerging from conversations with project collaborators and research in Swarthmore's Friends Historical Library and Peace Collection. These new works, which combine historic and contemporary experiences, were featured in exhibitions in Swarthmore and Philadelphia, and will soon travel to New York; and

WHEREAS, Art projects like the Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary Project act as cultural brokers that create space for self-expression, learning new skills and knowledge, and accessing new opportunities that can contribute to rebuilding a quality of life. For project collaborators, the project was an opportunity to create an accessible narrative that explores the intricacies of migration, resettlement, and refuge; and

WHEREAS, One of the project's primary goals was to use the power of narrative to reduce bias and build an understanding of what it means to be a refugee in the United States. The collaborators agreed that reducing bias should be a primary goal of the project and personal interactions have proven to reduce prejudice directed towards refugee and immigration groups; and

WHEREAS, The project also interrogated the deep emotional and personal impact of Executive Order 13769, commonly referred to as the "Muslim Ban," and the way it destabilized the lives of many Syrians living in Philadelphia. As one project collaborator shared, "I haven't seen my son in eight years and I have never held my grandchildren. I don't know that I ever will"; and

WHEREAS, The Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary archive-which will be housed at Swarthmore College at the

conclusion of the project-represents an important archival resource about the contemporary moment for Syrian and Iraqi individuals in Philadelphia, among the growing archive devoted to individuals who have resettled, emigrated, and sought asylum in the United States since the late 19th Century until the present day; and

WHEREAS, The project's collaborators also authored a resource guide "*for* people in resettlement, *by* people in resettlement" for incoming refugees. This resource guide highlights the contributions of resettled individuals and the services they can and must access to fully participate in our City. This work emphasizes trauma-informed mental health specialists, cultural-navigation counselors in schools and communities, legal advisors, and community-based language supports as key to supporting refugees in the City of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, The Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary project celebrates the resilience of people who face displacement, recognizes the complexity of refugee identities, and acknowledges our collective responsibility to document and share experiences of displacement, resettlement, and resilience; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors the Friends, Peace, and Sanctuary project for its work in providing Philadelphia-based Iraqi and Syrian residents a space to explore and share their experiences of migration, resilience, and refuge through the arts.