



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU
Governor

October 20, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to seek your assistance with an important matter. This letter is not a commentary on immigration enforcement writ large, but rather an appeal on behalf of approximately 69 individuals living in Dover, New Hampshire (and their families) who entered our country legally, have attempted to follow the proper legal immigration process and now face deportation.

In the late 1990s after fleeing religious persecution and violence against Christians in their home country of Indonesia, these individuals entered our country legally on tourist visas and filed applications for asylum. Their petitions were ultimately rejected for what appear to have been mostly technical deficiencies, and they remained in this country undocumented and fearful of returning home. They ultimately settled in Dover as part of a larger community of approximately 1500 individuals of Indonesian descent. All are active members of various churches in the Dover area, and all have children who were born in this country and are thus citizens of the United States and the State of New Hampshire.

In 2010, Senator Jeanne Shaheen helped to develop a program designed to encourage these individuals to come forward and be documented. Those who qualified for the program were told that they would be allowed to remain in the United States, but would have to check in with ICE every 3 months and apply annually for renewal of their residency status. The 69 individuals who are subject of this letter all came forward to ICE as part of this program. It is my understanding that earlier this year, the decision was made to terminate this program and others like it around the country. The 69 individuals thereafter received notification of the enforcement of their deportation orders and that they would be required to return to Indonesia.

While their deportations are temporarily on hold pending review by a federal judge in Boston, the outcome of their case remains uncertain. For the reasons described in this letter, **I am respectfully requesting that your administration reconsider its decision to deport these individuals, and I urge a resolution that will allow them to remain in the United States.**

We are a nation of laws, yet we have an obligation to enforce our laws fairly and sensibly. Our immigration laws are no exception. People such as these 69 individuals who have made an honest attempt to navigate the legal process, who have a valid legal claim for asylum, and who

have come forward to work with authorities should not be on the front line for deportation. Their children, many of whom are American citizens, should not be forced to return to a country they have never known, to learn a language they do not speak, and to conform to a society that will not allow them or their parents the freedom to practice their faith as they choose. These families have become an integral part of their neighborhoods, schools and churches. They seek to practice their Christian faith without fear of persecution. Their cases deserve close examination, and I am confident that upon a closer review you will see that these 69 individuals should be afforded the protection from persecution that all people of faith deserve regardless of what faith they choose to practice. At a time of rising violence against people of various faiths around the world, such protection has never been more important.

While I firmly believe that we must take steps to curb illegal immigration, it is also imperative that we make the process for legal immigration more streamlined and practical. The experience of the 69 individuals involved in this case serves as a perfect example. They came to this country fleeing persecution, and were met with the burdensome and confusing requirements that accompany the asylum process. It is not realistic to expect that those who flee persecution will have the resources to navigate a complicated legal process. I sincerely hope that your administration will take steps to secure our border, stop illegal immigration, and make the process for legal immigration one that can be navigated by all those who come to this country seeking a better life, irrespective of their country of origin or the resources at their disposal.

If your staff has questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact my legal counsel, John Formella, at 603-271-2121 or john.formella@nh.gov. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your public service.

Sincerely,



Christopher T. Sununu
Governor

Cc: The Honorable Rex Tillerson, United States Secretary of State
The Honorable Elaine Duke, Acting United States Secretary of Homeland Security