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Bill on Syrians is Florida at its worst

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In the Florida House, HB 1095, known as "Prevention of Acts of War," would confer immigration and refugee resettlement authority to the governor and attorney general, empower the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to conduct background screenings, and notes the governor's police powers and capacity to use military force ("including the general militia") to prevent the entry or resettlement into Florida of "restricted persons" — immigrants or refugees coming from countries where "invaders" or "prospective invaders" of the United States are present. This bill has made it through three Florida House committees; a companion Senate bill was stalled in committee.

This bill has been judged unconstitutional by the FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights and the ACLU, among others, since immigration law and refugee resettlement are exclusively within the ambit of the federal government. This bill is thus predicted to result in litigation and related costs to Florida taxpayers, in a legal battle the state would be highly unlikely to win. The bill also ignores the rigorous refugee vetting processes already in place for Syrian (and Iraqi) refugees that reportedly take 18 to 24 months to clear anyone into the United States. Most importantly, the bill codifies scapegoating an entire population fleeing violence and terrorism, and encourages surveillance and profiling of innocent people, perpetuating harmful stereotypes while turning our backs and hearts on some of the most vulnerable populations.

This bill is based on no evidence whatsoever. Repeated analyses have found that Syrian refugees do not pose any significant security threat, considering the vetting process, the population and the tiny percentage being resettled in the United States. Even the libertarian Cato Institute came to this conclusion. The idea behind this bill's necessity because "Florida has been under an imminent threat of invasion of foreign persons since 9/11" is ludicrous and embarrassing. This bill represents the worst of Florida, of America, and is not just a waste of taxpayer money but is actively contributing to the justification of stereotyping, profiling and scapegoating the very people who need our help the most.