



## House advances bill pulling Florida out of refugee assistance program

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A bill that would remove Florida from the federal refugee resettlement advanced in the Florida House after a party line vote on Thursday.

The legislation sponsored by Deltona Republican **David Santiago** would direct the state's refugee coordinator to provide notice to the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement by June 30 that it intends to withdraw from the federal program by year's end. The House Children, Families and Seniors subcommittee voted to take the first steps in separating the state from the federal program. However, the bill is highly symbolic in nature, since the resettling of refugees into Florida will continue, but with the federal funds that currently flow into the state for the program instead going directly to the social service and non profit groups that work with the refugees.

The vote comes after House Speaker **Richard Corcoran** praised President **Donald Trump** for his "bold action" in temporarily banning refugees from entering the United States (that decision was reversed by the U.S. 9th Circuit of Appeals last week).

The issue of resettling Syrian refugees in Florida has been a hot topic for Governor **Rick Scott** and other Republicans in the Legislature for going back to late in 2015, when he joined **more than 30 other governors** around the nation in telling the Obama administration that it was time for a pause in bringing any more Syrian refugees to the U.S.

"The bill doesn't actually do anything to improve the security situation for refugees that are settled here," said Scott Duncan with the Southern Poverty Law Center on Thursday. "It doesn't stop refugees from being resettled here. It doesn't stop refugees from other states from coming here. What it does say is that Florida is going to wash its hands and close its eyes."

But Venice Republican **Julio Gonzalez** says the federal government's failure to provide more information to the state regarding the refugees makes it a bad deal for the state.

"This is not a partnership," said Gonzalez. "This is not is a negotiation between two equal standing parties for mutual benefit. There is no mutual consideration."

Dover Republican **Ross Spano** agreed. "Don't tell us to like it or lump it," he said of the federal government's stance on the issue.

According to The Cato Institute, between 1975 and 2015 only 20 refugees were involved in terrorism or planning attacks – and none of those attacks played out in Florida or were planned in the state.