

WILLIAM LEHMAN
13TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE:
APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN OPERATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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PLEASE REPLY TO DISTRICT OFFICE

October 31, 1979

Dear Friends:

In order to keep you informed of efforts to find solutions to the problems facing Haitian refugees in South Florida, I am providing you with the following update.

1) Work permits - Because the Justice Department has remained adamant in its refusal to grant work authorizations, a lawsuit was filed by the National Council of Churches. On August 29th, a court order was issued granting a preliminary injunction which required the Immigration and Naturalization Service to restore the work permits which had been previously revoked. This order will remain in effect until the hearing on permanent injunctive relief is held on February 1, 1980. In spite of the injunction, however, very few Haitians have actually received work authorizations.

2) Black Caucus - Early this summer, I met with members of the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss the plight of the refugees. Several Caucus members had spoken out individually in the past on this subject, but now the organization has put itself firmly on record in support of just and equal treatment of the Haitians. The Caucus formed a special Haitian Task Force chaired by Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm of New York. I have sought to cooperate with the task force and participated in a press conference at which the Black Caucus issued a strong statement condemning U.S. treatment of the Haitian refugees.

3) Parole - In August, I issued a statement which called for allowing those Haitians who had applied for political asylum before June 30, 1979 to remain in the United States. It would be cruel to keep these approximately 8,000 persons in a legal limbo for the number of years it would take to give them full due process. Those Haitians applying for asylum after June 30th would be afforded the opportunity to prove their cases within a reasonable amount of time. Recently, numerous religious, civil rights and labor organizations have also called for granting parole to these people. I anticipate a growing number of individuals will join us in the near future.

4) Refugee legislation - Congress is presently working on the Refugee Act of 1979 which would reform our laws pertaining to refugees. The most important aspect of this bill is the redefining of political refugees. In the future, our laws will not limit the designation of political refugee to those persons who have fled communist-dominated governments or the Middle East. The new definition will relate to persecution regardless of geographic location.

The Foreign Affairs Committee is seeking sequential referral of this bill as soon as the Judiciary Committee issues its report. A subcommittee chaired by Congressman Dante Fascell has held hearings on the bill. One possible amendment would make communities such as Dade County eligible to receive reimbursement for funds spent on social services for persons awaiting determination of political asylum claims.

5) Grant proposal - On September 27th, a grant proposal, which had been developed by a committee of representatives from social service agencies in consultation with our office and with Dade County officials, was submitted to the Community Services Administration. The purpose of the proposal is to obtain funding for coordinating a full range of human services, including day care, English language training, legal services, and job placement for the Haitians in the Miami area.

6) Trip report - Following my April trip to Haiti, I submitted a report to the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations.

If you would like to have a copy of this report, or of my August statement concerning parole or the Black Caucus statement on Haitian refugees, please let me know by writing to me at 2440 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515, or by calling my North Miami Beach office at 945-7518.

I hope this information has been useful in keeping you up-to-date on developments affecting the Haitian refugee community in South Florida.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,



WILLIAM LEHMAN
Member of Congress