



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

September 18, 2020

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, we write in response to a February 14, 2020, letter by the U.S. Department of State acknowledging negotiations with the government of Laos to accept deported Hmong and other Lao U.S. residents. We understand that legal residents may be deported if they have committed certain crimes and that previous administrations have sent several hundred individuals back to Laos, but we urge you to limit, not amplify, such deportations.

Our nation has a unique and profound responsibility to Hmong and Lao living in the U.S. During the Vietnam war, our government recruited thousands of their men and boys to fight in what is known as the Secret War. Tens of thousands died for us and after the war ended, thousands more were killed or persecuted by the communist government of Laos because of this very collaboration. Of those who survived, most were forced to flee their homeland, spending years in Thai refugee camps before being allowed to emigrate to the U.S.

Today, Wisconsin has the third largest Hmong population after California and Minnesota. Our Catholic community has developed important ties, as many Hmong were resettled through Catholic Charities agencies and some are members of our Church. As recently as 2004, Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Green Bay resettled 3,500 Hmong refugees living in Thailand. Catholic parishes helped provide housing, furniture, food, clothing, transportation, tutoring, and work for the new arrivals, just as they had done a generation earlier. Last year, the Diocese of La Crosse established a new Hmong parish, Mary, Mother of Good Help, in Wausau.

We greatly admire how the Hmong have made Wisconsin their home—a home so very different from the one they were forced to flee. They have shown astonishing resiliency, vibrancy, and family cohesion all across our state, after having suffered unspeakable brutality and trauma. They are leaders, teachers, business owners, farmers, friends, and neighbors.

We stand with the Hmong community that despairs once again of being separated from family members. The vast majority of those facing deportation have paid their debt to society. Some are parents with children. We must do everything in our power to avoid traumatizing yet another generation.

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While it is true that individuals bear responsibility for their actions, governments do as well. Our nation has a responsibility to make certain that our allies and their families are protected and not abandoned. We therefore urge you to rescind current efforts to deport Hmong and other Lao. While we are concerned about all those who flee persecution and violence, those from Laos deserve special recognition for their service, sacrifices, and many contributions to our nation.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecki, Archbishop of Milwaukee
Most Reverend Donald J. Hying, Bishop of Madison
Most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay
Most Reverend William P. Callahan, Bishop of La Crosse
Most Reverend James P. Powers, Bishop of Superior

Cc (*via e-mail*): The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo, United States Secretary of State
The Honorable Chad F. Wolf, U.S. Department of Homeland Security Acting
Secretary
The Honorable Tammy Baldwin, United States Senator
The Honorable Ron Johnson, United States Senator