



RODNEYSE BICHOTTE
Assemblymember 42nd District
Kings County

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December 22, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

RE: The halting of humanitarian parole for Haitians and their inevitable deportation

Dear Secretary Johnson,

My name is Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte (D-NY, Brooklyn, 42nd Assembly District), I write to you today, along with my colleagues State Senator Kevin Parker (D-NY, Brooklyn, 20th Senatorial District), and City Council Member Jumaane D. Williams (D-NY, Brooklyn, 45th City Council District). Together we represent districts, which contain a high concentration of Haitian residents. I, myself, am the first Haitian-American elected from New York City to be elected to the State legislature. We are writing you today because we have concerns about the decision by the Obama administration to resume deportations of Haitians that are at the U.S./Mexico border.

America has long been known as the land of opportunity, and a country that has opened its borders to immigrants. If we look at more recent immigrants, such as Cubans, there has long been a policy that once they arrive, if they make it to our shores, they are allowed to stay and granted refugee status. There were also Salvadorans and Guatemalans, which sought asylum in our country during the civil war in El Salvador, many to whom asylum was granted. Ultimately, legislation was put in place, the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central Relief Act (1972), which allowed these groups to apply directly for a green card. In addition, the Obama administration has recently said it would accept 110,000 Syrian refugees. In light of these policies, it would appear, that these Haitian immigrants are being singled out.

Haiti has just experienced Hurricane Matthew, a category 4. This is the first major hurricane in over 50 years, and even though the eye of the storm has passed, the mudslides and continued rainfall following the hurricane were concerns for meteorologists. Forecasters after the hurricane predicted an additional 20 inches of rainfall in Haiti's lower elevations and 40 inches in the mountains. Officials reported that almost 400 homes had been destroyed. Haitians have



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posted pictures to social media documenting the wreckage and devastation during and after the storm.

In addition, although the world came to Haiti's aid when she experienced her devastating earthquake, it was soon revealed that many of the non-governmental organizations that were entrusted to supply the aid exploited the situation there and left the people with close to nothing. On top of that because of a United Nations mission, Haiti's people have experienced a devastating cholera epidemic, whereby an estimated 750,000 Haitians have been affected, and thousands of Haitians have died painful deaths due to this disease. The United Nations has just admitted its part in this and has begun to address this travesty. Many Haitians, due to the earthquake, have had no choice but to seek a better life outside of their motherland, and many are now at the United States/Mexico border hoping to realize that dream.

On September 24th, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) abruptly halted humanitarian parole for Haitians arriving at our California border. The reason that was given for the change in course was that country conditions in Haiti had improved and that there was a need to deter more people from coming. The news came as a shock given that our own US State Department had issued travel warnings for Haiti, which is suffering from political and economic instability and is still recovering from natural and other disasters including a devastating earthquake followed by a hurricane followed by a cholera epidemic that has displaced or killed countless Haitians. The country has a new president. Contrary to what DHS has stated, the situation in Haiti has not improved it has worsened, warranting a humanitarian response, not harsh enforcement.

Perhaps one of the unintended consequences is the impact it is having on families – women and children have been separated from the husbands and fathers. This has impacted at least 50 families. Without an effort to rectify this situation, DHS' forced separation of family members may mean that families are separated for a lifetime. Those who crossed through will be able to stay in a humanitarian status in the US. Those who were caught on the other side will be stuck in Mexico or detained if they approach the border under threat of deportation until Haiti is able to receive them back if it ever is. At a minimum, recognize that these families were separated when the US government abruptly changed its policy.

We are currently seeing what appears to be an unprecedented humanitarian crisis throughout the world. Like their peers these Haitian immigrants face a great deal of uncertainty if they



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were to go back to their home country – political and economic instability, a cholera epidemic, and the fallout from the recent hurricane, not to mention that their biggest obstacle will likely be that the Haitian government will not accept them due to documentation issues. They will be completely without a country. We would like to urge the Obama Administration to please reconsider their recent actions and reverse their course to deport undocumented Haitian immigrants while there is still time.

Sincerely,

Rodneyse Bichotte
Member, NYS Assembly

Kevin Parker
NYS Senator

Jumaane D. Williams
Member, NYC Council