

## POLITICAL NOTEBOOK

# Council Dems react to Hogan's refugee stance

The Howard County Council's four Democrats are speaking out against Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan's decision earlier this week to ask that the federal government stop efforts to resettle Syrian refugees in the state until it can be determined they are not a danger to public safety.

Friday, council members Mary Kay Sigaty, Calvin Ball, Jen Terrasa and **Jon Weinstein** sent an open letter to Hogan, writing they are "alarmed" by the request.

"In Howard County, we know that our diversity is our strength," the four council members continue. "Your request to end the settlement of Syrian refugees under the guise of protecting Marylanders erodes that strength by succumbing to fear – a fear that leads to overt racial profiling, which is an affront to our values."

Hogan's announcement, on Nov. 17, came four days after the Nov. 13 terror attacks on Paris. In a statement, he said he had asked for resettlement of Syrian refugees to cease "until the U.S. govern-

ment can provide appropriate assurances that refugees from Syria pose no threat to public safety."

With the decision, Hogan joined more than 20 Republican governors and at least one Democratic governor who have moved to halt refugee resettlement in their states.

Friday, Hogan spokeswoman Erin Montgomery reiterated the governor's stance. "The governor's first priority is the safety and security of Marylanders, and that will never change," she said.

Despite the announcement, Hogan has little authority to block refugee resettlement in Maryland. Courts have ruled that immigration decisions fall under the purview of the federal government.

In their letter, Howard council members said taking in refugees is "an essential American value.

"These refugees have taken huge risks," they wrote. "It's heartbreaking



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to think of families who are so desperate to escape unspeakable horrors that they would jeopardize their own lives and those of their children, setting out for the unknown...

"It is only right that we embrace our role as a nation of immigrants and continue to welcome all people, families and children seeking refuge and protection within our borders," the letter concludes.

Councilman Greg Fox, the only Republican on the council, said the other four council members reached out to him before sending the letter, but he decided not to sign because "I believe that what Governor Hogan and many other governors are doing is what they were elected to do – protect their citizens."

Fox said he saw Hogan's approach as "one of safety first," and not anti-refugee.

"He has only asked for the U.S. government to provide appropriate

assurances that the refugees from Syria pose no threat to public safety before continuing the process...doing anything less would be a breach of fiduciary responsibility," Fox wrote in an email.

Fox also noted that nearly a quarter of House Democrats, including Rep. John Delaney of Maryland, voted for a bill Thursday that would stop the admission of Syrian refugees into the country until vetting processes are made even stricter. President Barack Obama has threatened to veto the bill.

Howard County Executive Allan Kittleman did not immediately respond to a request for comment Friday.

According to results from the American Community Survey, which council members cite in the letter, about 19 percent of Howard County residents were born outside the United States, compared to 14 percent of residents who are foreign-born statewide.

The full letter is posted on the council's website [howardcountymd.gov](http://howardcountymd.gov).