

6.1 **ADVOCACY FOR THE EXPANSION OF THE COMMONWEALTH COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAM**

Submitting Councillor: Cr Josh Fergeus

MOTION

That Council:

1. *Notes Amnesty International's advocacy for the expansion and improvement to the Commonwealth Government's Community Support Program;*
2. *Offers its support to Amnesty's advocacy efforts by writing to the Commonwealth Government, to request the future expansion and improvement of the Community Support Program, to assist refugees and people seeking asylum with their settlement in the City of Monash;*
3. *Requests that Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) write to local Federal Members of Parliament, Prime Minister the Hon. Scott Morrison, the leader of the Opposition the Hon. Anthony Albanese, and the Federal Minister of Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. David Coleman, to call on improving and expanding the current Community Support Program (CSP) by :*
 - i adopting a more affordable visa structure for the CSP to make it more accessible to sponsors, including community organisations, families and businesses;*
 - ii making the CSP places additional to the current Government humanitarian program intake, in order to recognise the generosity of our communities and businesses, rather than shifting both the costs and responsibility to them*
 - iii providing adequate support and services to assist with re-settlement and community integration; and*
 - iv ensuring people in need of protection are prioritised to settle in Australia.*
4. *Submit a motion to the 2020 ALGA Assembly seeking expansion and improvement of the CSP as outlined above.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 the Australian Government introduced a Community Proposal Pilot that enabled communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, to propose applicants for humanitarian visas. In 2016, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a Community Sponsorship Program (CSP) to follow on from this pilot program.

In the lead up to the 2019 Federal Election, Council provide advocacy support to Amnesty International's *My New Neighbour* campaign, which called for the Government to expand the Community Support Program, to allow for more community organisations such as schools, churches and non-government organisations to contribute to the re-settlement of refugees.

Now Amnesty International is calling upon Council to support its advocacy efforts so that more people and organisations in Monash can be a part of the CSP and sponsor refugees.

DISCUSSION

In 2016 the Federal Government announced the establishment of the Community Support Program (CSP), giving communities and businesses, as well as families and individuals, an opportunity to sponsor applicants for humanitarian visas. A Community Support Program enables members of the community to sponsor visas for refugees from around the world who wish to begin the process of resettling in Australia.

With no improvements implemented to the program since the new Federal Government term, Amnesty International is continuing its advocacy efforts and is calling for the CSP to be expanded and improved.

Amnesty International notes the Commonwealth Government's positive decision to support refugees coming to Australia by announcing a Community Support Program (CSP) from July 1 2017. The current program has an annual intake of 1,000 per year; based upon Australia's wealth, population and recent levels of interest in community sponsorship, Amnesty International recommends that the Australia community could support the sponsorship of around 10,000 refugees per annum through the CSP.

The cost and application times for community sponsors of applicants under the CSP are high (upwards of \$19,000 per first individual) and therefore may be prohibitive to potential sponsors, including local community groups, sporting clubs and small businesses. In addition, the current priority criteria for refugees applying under the CSP are incredibly strict, and therefore may lead to discrimination against those who are most in need of protection.

Amnesty International is advocating for the Commonwealth Government to adopt a more affordable visa structure for the CSP, in order to make it more accessible to sponsors, including community organisations, families and businesses. Currently, CSP sponsored places are not additional to the Commonwealth Government's existing humanitarian intake commitment, which further reduces the incentive for potential sponsors to support the program. By making the CSP places additional to the Government's humanitarian program intake, it would recognise the generosity of our communities and businesses, rather than shifting both the costs and responsibility to them.

Refugees and migrants have made a positive contribution to our economy and our communities. Expansion of the CSP will increase the opportunities for safe and legal entry into Australia and one way to do this is through community-led sponsorship.

Australian neighbourhoods have proven to be generous, welcoming communities when given the opportunity to do so. An expansion and improvement of the Community Support Program will allow businesses, community organisations and local families to help too. A strengthened CSP will provide a clear and compassionate system for Australians, through their businesses, community organisations and family connections, to welcome refugees and people seeking asylum into their local communities.

Almost 150 Australian local government areas are self-declared Refugee Welcome Zones. The City of Monash signed the Refugee Welcome Zone Declaration in 2002. A Refugee Welcome Zone is a local government area that has made a commitment to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding their human rights, demonstrating compassion and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.

Monash Council has a strong commitment to its community and supports cultural diversity and it values and respects the expression of difference. Monash Council has demonstrated significant leadership in the areas of multicultural policy development, service provision and support for culturally and linguistically diverse residents.

CONCLUSION

Advocating for the improvement of the Community Support Program is in line with Monash Council's position on providing humanitarian support for refugee and asylum seekers wishing to resettle in Australia. It demonstrates Monash Council's commitment and leadership in making practical contributions to helping refugees settle into their new neighbourhoods and lives in Australia.

By supporting Amnesty International's advocacy to the Australian Local Government Association, Council is making a symbolic, non-binding expression of support to place this issue on the national agenda of all tiers of Government.