

Messaging Guidance:

How to talk about the buses of migrants and asylum seekers

BACKGROUND: In April 2022, Texas Governor Abbott announced his plans to send migrants and asylum seekers to cities far from the southern border. He was joined in this cruel and politically-motivated stunt by the governors of Arizona (Ducey) and Florida (DeSantis). The receiving cities include Washington, D.C, New York City, Chicago, and, more recently, Martha's Vineyard. Whether we're talking about buses, planes, or trains, and regardless of the destination, the governors' intent was clear - to dehumanize immigrants and asylum seekers and advance their hateful policy goals.

This depraved relocation stunt is not new. During the 1960s, segregationists misled African Americans into taking "[Reverse Freedom Rides](#)" to Hyannisport, MA, and other cities in the North. Little has changed. ***Today's buses are meant to advance an anti-immigrant agenda and instill fear and hatred toward immigrants and people seeking asylum in the receiving cities. And it is a playbook that we have seen many times before: scapegoating people seeking protection during an election year to divide Americans and distract them from the issues impacting their communities.*** As in 2018, when candidates tried to make the elections about migrant caravans, politicians are now chartering buses and airplanes to recreate the caravan narrative and paint Black, Indigenous, and brown immigrants as invaders to be feared, all in a ploy to divide and distract. However, communities, volunteers, and local organizations have risen to the challenge of welcoming people – all of whom have been vetted and cleared to enter the U.S. to seek protection.

Many people seeking asylum on these buses come from countries like Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, where they face deadly political violence and persecution. Others are fleeing systemic violence in Central America, Haiti, Colombia, and other countries where their lives are at risk. Seeking asylum is a legal form of entry under U.S. and international law.

This story is really about welcoming.

- Wherever people seeking asylum have arrived across the United States, there has been a heart-warming outpouring of support. People are doing what Americans have traditionally done: welcoming immigrants seeking safety and aiding neighbors in need.
- Heroic volunteers from groups like the Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid Network in DC and New York Mutual Aid Groups, [Team TLC NYC](#), and [NYIC](#) *[add your local*

examples] are stepping up and showing the true character of their communities and embodying our values as a welcoming nation. Welcoming looks like these volunteers and these communities, which show the best of who we are as a nation.

- When people were misled by Gov. DeSantis and dropped off in Martha's Vineyard, the community rallied. Helpers stepped up and proved DeSantis wrong.
- Grandparents, mothers and fathers, healthcare workers, faith communities, retirees, and people from all walks of life – who see the need to help – are coming together to dedicate their time, skills, and resources to welcome people seeking asylum.
- The intent of this hate-filled stunt is backfiring. Incredible volunteers, organizations, and communities have stepped up to welcome and lend a helping hand to migrants and people seeking asylum.

Seeking asylum is a legal right.

- Our nation is at its best when we serve as a beacon of hope for people seeking freedom, safety, and protection from persecution.
- People seeking asylum are individuals, children, and families fleeing danger and persecution and exercising their human and legal right to seek safety in the United States. The right to seek asylum through a legal process in court is guaranteed under U.S. and international law.
- We need national immigration policies that allow people fleeing oppression and violence to seek refuge, reunite with their families, and support themselves. Congress must step up to help rebuild a humane and dignified asylum system. Otherwise, politicians will continue to exploit people seeking safety for cheap publicity.
- Now is the moment for local, state, and federal governments to collaborate and ensure a dignified reception for those seeking safety rather than sowing chaos.

It's time for all levels of government to step up and follow the lead of their heroic constituents.

- The United States has a decades-long, widely supported history of welcoming refugees through multisector, public-private partnerships between governments, non-profit organizations, faith groups, and community volunteers. Just like refugees, asylum seekers have fled violence and persecution and are just as deserving of a humane and dignified reception system.
- Similar to how volunteers and local organizations collaborate to welcome people seeking safety, federal, state, and local governments must work together to

support a humane and dignified reception system for asylum seekers as they navigate their legal cases.

- Advocates, volunteers, and local and national groups are ready to work with all levels of the government to create a holistic system that meets the needs of our communities and people seeking safety.

DeSantis, Abbott, and Ducey are cruel and wrong.

- DeSantis' stunt is a clear attempt to sabotage asylum seekers' and migrants' legal cases by stranding them on a remote island to prevent them from appearing at scheduled court hearings, which puts them at risk of deportation back to the very dangers they had fled.
- Abbott, Ducey, and DeSantis are intentionally misleading asylum seekers and migrants, coaxing them onto buses and planes with false promises, and refusing to coordinate with organizations and local governments.
 - People must be free to select their destination and should not be defrauded or exploited.
- Transporting newly arrived migrants and people seeking asylum to their families or communities is an integral part of a humane asylum process. Unfortunately, Abbott, Ducey, and DeSantis's intent is cruel. They intend to sow mistrust and disorder. They are using human beings to deflect from their policy failures.
 - True leaders offer solutions, not fear and cruelty.
- There is a human cost to these cheap political stunts. Some who have fallen victim to the governors' scheme have been left homeless, stranded far from their intended destinations and support networks in the United States.

PIVOTS:

When asked if there is a "crisis" at the border.

- There is a humanitarian need at the border, but Govs. DeSantis and Abbott are creating chaos.
- Migration to the U.S.-Mexico border is not new. Local organizations across the border are experts at welcoming people seeking asylum with dignity, including providing basic humanitarian needs, helping them reach their final destinations in the United States, and consulting with them on their legal cases.
 - Many of #WelcomeWithDignity's partner organizations on the border have been doing this for decades.
 - The incredible welcome we have seen in communities receiving buses across the country reflects what local organizations have done on the border for decades.

- Inhumane border policies like Title 42 and Remain in Mexico force people to make impossible choices. Reopening regular asylum processing at ports of entry is critical to restoring a fair, orderly process for all seeking refuge in the U.S.
 - Local organizations, volunteers, shelters, and cities along the border for decades have been welcoming migrants and people seeking asylum and providing assistance as they pursue their legal cases.
 - After years of multiple policies that have essentially closed the border to people fleeing persecution, oppression, and violence, access to the asylum process is slowly being restored.
- Organizations at the border and communities across the country have long sought government support for people to reach their destinations and reunite with family in the United States. Resourcing transportation is one of many ways to ensure a humane and dignified reception system for people seeking safety.

Only if asked a zero-sum question about resources being diverted, eg, resources for the un-housed:

- We can do both, and we have been doing both.
 - Take the example of a D.C. church that welcomes people seeking asylum in the morning with a hot breakfast and then makes lunches for the people experiencing homelessness in the community every day.
- By working together and sharing what groups have learned while working with people experiencing homelessness and other marginalized populations, we can find creative new solutions to help all members of our communities.

Only if asked about Mayor Bowser's or Mayor Adams's comments on asylum seekers as a strain on their city:

- The Mayor's past comments are unfortunate. Seeking asylum is a human and legal right. After years of a near ban on who and how people can seek asylum, we're finally starting a slow return to normal. But normal is not enough. We must keep advocating for all people seeking safety to be welcomed with dignity.
- Our local leaders should follow the lead of the people in their communities who have stepped up to show the true character of NYC/Washington, DC/Chicago/Martha's Vineyard.
- This moment calls for local and federal elected officials to be humanitarian leaders and showcase what it means to be a welcoming community.

- Our elected officials must work with and provide much-needed government funding to local organizations that have stepped up to welcome and support migrants and people seeking asylum.