

## Member Spotlight: Abby Williamson's Legislative Meetings Inform Refugee Resettlement Bill

OCTOBER 8, 2025

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What's the connection between the loneliness epidemic and U.S. refugee resettlement policy? A lot, according to Trinity College political scientist [Abigail Fisher Williamson](#), who co-leads the [Connecticut SSN chapter](#). That's the message she brought to Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) last June, when she met with his office during the Hill Day that followed SSN's 2024 National Convening in Washington DC.



*SSN members Abby Fisher Williamson and Ernesto Castañeda visited Sen. Murphy's office together in June 2024.*

Williamson studies immigration policy in the United States, including refugee resettlement. Her interest in the topic began in graduate school, when she began to explore the question of how diverse communities learn to trust one another and take collective action. That led her to the topic of her first book, [Welcoming New Americans? Local Governments and Immigrant Incorporation](#), which found that in cities that experience refugee resettlement, local governments more effectively serve immigrants in general. And because community groups often help refugees find housing, jobs, and education, resettlement also builds strong social ties between established residents and new arrivals. By incorporating refugees, communities grow stronger and leave individuals less isolated and lonely.

"Senator Murphy has been talking about this extraordinary problem of loneliness in our society, which relates to the fact that we don't trust one another. And that is just so fundamentally destructive to democracy, as we're seeing."

When Williamson met with Sen. Murphy's office in June 2024, she spoke to them specifically about the Welcome Corps program that began during the Biden administration, which allowed a group of 5 volunteers to sponsor a refugee and oversee their incorporation into their community.

"Senator Murphy's office was hearing from a lot of constituents with interest in community sponsorship, and so when I mentioned it in relation to loneliness, I think it piqued their interest."

Williamson emphasized the benefits of this model to Sen. Murphy's legislative aide, Ryan Walsh, and left behind a brief summary of her research and insights on the program.

In December 2024, as Sen. Murphy was trying to prepare for potential immigration policies under the second Trump administration, Walsh reached back out to Williamson to request a follow-up conversation. Williamson wrote up a literature review of community sponsorship programs in other countries, and suggested some improvements to the Welcome Corps' operations and design.

As expected, Trump suspended all refugee admissions in January, effectively ending the Welcome Corps. This August, however, Walsh reached back out to Williamson to let her know that Sen. Murphy had just introduced a new bill, the [Community-Based Refugee Reception Act](#), authorizing the State Department to establish a program modeled on Welcome Corps. Walsh expressed gratitude for her "thoughtful help during all our discussions on this." While it's certain that many people influenced the crafting of this legislation, Williamson appreciated the opportunity to "help connect the dots and provide evidence of the social benefits of community sponsorship."

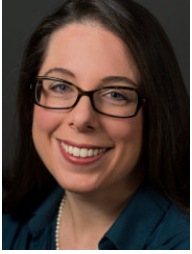
"In some ways it's been a natural evolution of my career to link my earlier work on social connection to immigration policy. But having the guidance and structure of SSN has motivated me to pursue opportunities to plug my research findings into ongoing policy debates."

The bill was first introduced to the U.S. Senate on August 1, and referred to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary.

This success motivates Williamson to continue creating similar opportunities for her fellow scholars. As a co-leader of Connecticut SSN, she has been instrumental in hosting the [Moving Beyond Implications conference](#) for the past two years—with the third coming up in January 2026. During the day-long event at the Connecticut Capitol, scholars are invited to give research presentations to the state legislature, Governor's office, and state agencies, providing research evidence that can serve policy goals. "Working with SSN gives me a structure and sets thresholds to remind me to apply my research findings to shape the policies I really care about."

## ABIGAIL FISHER WILLIAMSON

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Williamson's research focuses on immigration and health policy; urban politics; and political behavior. Williamson's recent book *Welcoming New Americans? Local Governments and Immigrant Incorporation* explains why cities welcome immigrants; and how these efforts both promote and restrict incorporation. Survey data from this project has been used by New American Economy to create an interactive index of cities' immigrant integration practices. In her current project; she is examining how Americans understand whose health deserves society's attention and investment with the interdisciplinary American Conceptions of Health Equity Study (ARCHES).