

Senate Joint Resolution No. 6

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 45

Senate Joint Resolution No. 6—Relative to survivors of torture.

[Filed with Secretary of State July 7, 2011.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SJR 6, Kehoe. Survivors of torture.

This measure would declare June 26, 2011, a Day in Support of Victims of Torture in California, and would urge the Office of Refugee Resettlement to direct torture treatment funding through the Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 so as to reflect California's role as the nation's largest resettlement destination for torture survivors.

WHEREAS, Approximately 100,000 residents of the State of California have found refuge here after enduring politically motivated torture in their home countries; and

WHEREAS, These survivors of torture bring their remarkable fortitude, resiliency, and powerful personal histories to their new state; and

WHEREAS, Many of these survivors have contributed greatly to California's communities, economy, cultural vibrancy, and understanding of the importance of human rights through opening businesses, performing professional services, founding charitable organizations, speaking out about their experiences, and volunteering on behalf of others; and

WHEREAS, These contributions come in spite of the lingering physical, emotional, and social impacts of enduring torture; and

WHEREAS, Studies and clinical reports on the consequences of torture have been found to include, but are not limited to, scarring, disfigurement, chronic pain, nightmares, insomnia, flashbacks, hypervigilance, difficulty forming relationships of trust, depression, panic attacks, and startle responses; and

WHEREAS, Absent access to appropriate care, these ongoing effects of torture can prevent or undermine the ability and desire of torture survivors to restore their dignity and thrive as productive members of their new California communities; and

WHEREAS, Treating the unique impact of torture on survivors requires highly specialized, holistic treatment; and

WHEREAS, California played a key role in the development of the torture treatment field in the late 1970s and early 1980s under the leadership of Dr. Jose Quiroga and Ana Deutsch, themselves refugees who fled from incidents of torture in Chile and Argentina, respectively, came to Los Angeles, and there went on to found the Program for Torture Victims (PTV) in order to

attend to the unique panoply of physical, emotional, and legal challenges faced by their fellow survivors; and

WHEREAS, California today is home to the largest number of torture treatment centers in the United States, including, but not limited to, the affiliates of the California Consortium of Torture Treatment Centers—the Center for Justice and Accountability in San Francisco; the Center for Survivors of Torture, Asian Americans for Community Involvement in San Jose; the Institute for Redress and Recovery at Santa Clara University; the Institute for the Study of Psychosocial Trauma in Palo Alto; Program for Torture Victims in Los Angeles; the Torture Survivors Project at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles; Survivors International in San Francisco; and Survivors of Torture, International in San Diego; and

WHEREAS, These centers collectively serve around 1,000 torture survivors annually; and

WHEREAS, These torture treatment programs rely heavily on the volunteerism of local professionals—among them doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, dentists, physical therapists, interpreters, lawyers, masseurs, plastic surgeons, and others—to provide holistic treatment far beyond the capacities of the centers' limited staffs and budgets; and

WHEREAS, Each year hundreds of California professionals donate thousands of hours of their time to acquire the necessary specialized training and assist torture survivors to heal; and

WHEREAS, Each year hundreds of Californians make charitable financial contributions to help make the services of these nonprofit centers possible at no charge to the survivors; and

WHEREAS, The Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) could use state-level public sector avenues to improve regional services for torture survivors by working with counties to include torture treatment in county mental health plans; and

WHEREAS, Data from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) demonstrates that California has been the top destination in the country for humanitarian immigrants (25 percent of all refugees since 1975, and 28 percent of all asylees in the federal fiscal year 2009, according to ORR and the California Refugee Programs Bureau), many of whom are torture survivors, but funding to provide adequate services for those refugees has been insufficient because the federal Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 has not been fully funded by Congress and ORR has not distributed domestic torture treatment under the Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 formulas to provide adequate funding to areas that serve disproportionate populations of formerly tortured refugees; and

WHEREAS, On June 26, 1997, the United Nations General Assembly marked the 10th anniversary of its adoption of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by establishing that date, annually, as International Day in Support of Victims of Torture; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature hereby acknowledges the widespread presence of survivors of torture residing throughout the State of California; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature welcomes and commends the contributions survivors of torture make to California's communities, economy, and cultural vibrancy; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature expresses its pride in California's emerging legacy as a place of refuge and healing for those who have endured torture; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature undertakes to encourage the further development of torture treatment services throughout the state by honoring professionals and volunteers who have dedicated their time to the treatment of torture survivors; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and the Assembly of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature urges ORR to direct torture treatment funding through the Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 so as to reflect California's role as the nation's largest resettlement destination for torture survivors; and be it further

Resolved, That June 26, 2011, be declared a Day in Support of Victims of Torture in California; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, and to the author for appropriate distribution.