

Ruling on TPS stokes new fears among Haitians

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Jul 15, 2026

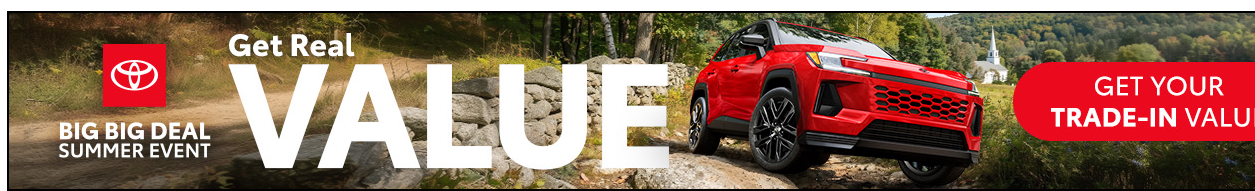
Mothers. Fathers. Mechanics. Caregivers. Home care workers. Hospital staff. Friends. Neighbors. Colleagues.

That's a snapshot of the kinds of people Teddi Jallow encounters every day in her role as the executive director and co-founder of the Refugee Dream Center in Rhode Island.

She says these are the people who will be directly impacted by the Trump administration's actions to end Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Haitians and Syrians.

The program permits **roughly 350,000 Haitians and 6,000 Syrians** to live and work legally in the United States on humanitarian grounds, protecting them from certain countries that are experiencing instability, armed conflict, environmental disasters and other extraordinary conditions.

Last month, the Supreme Court, in a 6-3 decision, allowed the Department of Homeland Security to continue with its plans to end TPS for Haitians and Syrians. Losing TPS status means those affected will have to leave the country or seek other legal means to stay in the U.S. lawfully.





In June, local nonprofit New Bridges for Haitian Success (NB4HS) held a press conference in response to the U.S. Supreme Court's TPS decision regarding Haitians. Local and state elected officials and community members were in attendance as community leaders called for urgent action against the Trump administration's termination of protected status. *Submitted photo by NB4HS staff member Marc Delia.*

"It's an "attack on humanity," said Jallow of the decision. "This is really sad for the Refugee Dream Center because it is sad to see people who just want to survive being treated as if they are not human beings."

In Rhode Island, the TPS program has allowed thousands of Haitians to live and work in their communities. It is a community that the Refugee Dream Center serves extensively.

A nonprofit agency, the Refugee Dream Center helps refugees and immigrants resettle in Rhode Island and navigate the system, providing aid with housing, legal assistance and employment, and offering a youth program, mentorship and a women's program.

Jallow notes that Haitians are primarily the ones who depend on TPS, and she says that since the high court's decision, she is seeing Haitian families coming to the center more than ever.

It's the fear and unanswerable questions of what happens next that Jallow says she sees the most now.

"They were very happy before, and now you see the depression in their faces," Jallow said. "You see the fear, you see people asking me questions that you cannot even answer."

Not knowing is the worst, Jallow says. She explains that it is the uncertainty about whether you are safe that adds to the harrowing experience.

"Because you don't know what happens tomorrow," Jallow said. "You know today is over. At least you are lucky to come back home to your family or to your house, but tomorrow you don't know."

Jallow describes situations where mothers are preparing for the worst and providing contacts for the center to reach out to in case they are deported and separated from their children.

"As a mother myself, I feel terrible because these are things that no mother should sit and think of, 'Oh, if I am kidnapped by ICE and being deported to Haiti' where of course we all know what is happening in Haiti, 'do this with my kid, call this person for my kid.' That should not happen,'" Jallow said.

According to the U.S. Department of State, there is a **level-four travel advisory** on Haiti, designating it as "Do Not Travel" due to the risk of kidnapping, terrorism, civil unrest and limited health care. The same level is **also designated for Syria** due to the risk of terrorism, unrest, hostage-taking and armed conflict.

It's these sorts of uncomfortable conversations the center is having not only with the people affected but also with its community partners and staff as they try to figure out a way to help those they serve. Jallow says they've also partnered with legal lawyers to make sure those affected can get the legal support they need.



With thousands of Haitians living in Rhode Island, Jallow says the center sees close to 300 Haitians monthly. She says they are there taking English classes, sometimes taking two or three buses to get to the center, or picking up food from the center's food distribution program. The center also has a citizenship class where they teach American history and all the necessary information to help people pass the test and become citizens.

NB4HS Founder and Executive Director Bernard Georges, left, with Refugee Dream Center Founder Dr. Omar Bah, right, holding Haitian flags alongside the Haitian Roots Band Kandjanwou RARA. *Submitted photo from Refugee Dream Center*

Jallow notes that oftentimes conversations surrounding immigrants and immigration policies tends to lose focus on the human element, a critical piece.

She emphasized that immigrants are not "criminals," addressing a sentiment in the country that most immigrants, particularly undocumented ones, are violent criminals.

Jallow says they are hardworking members of their communities who not only contribute to the state's economy, but also the economy of the United States at large.

Drawing on her own experience as a refugee (Jallow came to America in 2009 from Gambia, a country in West Africa), she said immigrants are often running away from "a destroyed society to come to the U.S. just to have a second chance."

"I want the American people, the Rhode Islanders to see what these people are contributing to, what they are doing, the amount of work that they are doing ... to get to where they are just [able] to survive," Jallow said.



On Saturday, June 20, the Refugee Dream Center hosted its World Refugee Day Celebration in Providence. *Submitted photo by Dominique Sindayiganza*

After the high court's decision, Rhode Island Democratic Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Jack Reed **denounced the ruling** as "epically bad" and urged Congress to take corrective action, according to a press release on the matter.

In June, both senators **cosponsored legislation** designating Haiti for TPS, offering three years of legal protections to Haitians. The bill has **already passed** in the U.S. House of Representatives.

"The U.S. Supreme Court got it wrong, but the U.S. Senate still has a chance to get it right, and we urge swift bipartisan action to extend TPS for people who are here legally, have already been vetted, are making positive contributions in our community, and who would face unsafe, life-threatening conditions if they were expelled from the United States," Whitehouse and Reed said in a joint statement last month.

But as the center, and many other agencies and nonprofits that serve these communities, brace what for comes next, the impact and real effects of the Supreme Court's decision remains to be seen, leaving those directly affected in a state of uncertainty, panic and fear, because as Jallow puts it, "Trump is good at keeping people on their toes."