Dear [add in the name of your MP]

**Sanctuary in Parliament** **2018**

**“Towards a Fairer System”
*12.00 – 16:00*Monday 12th November in Atlee Suite, Portcullis House**

**Cross-party MP and refugee panel 12:30 to 1:30**

I warmly invite you to attend the next **Sanctuary in Parliament,** an annual event which brings local City of Sanctuary groups and refugees from around the UK to Parliament to meet their MPs, on **Monday** **12th November 2018** in Portcullis House, Westminster.

This is an opportunity to talk to your constituents and with refugees and people seeking sanctuary with a view to positive dialogue and securing your support for a fairer and more compassionate system.

The aim of City of Sanctuary is to ensure that the UK is a welcoming place of safety for all and is proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.

The City of Sanctuary group in Southampton works to make Southampton a warm and welcoming place for refugees and asylum seekers. The group is made up of representatives of organisations including CLEAR, Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group, World Stages Now and Southampton Action amongst others.

They run events and activities to support the integration of sanctuary seekers and local people, encourage local organisations to consider the needs of asylum seekers and refugees and support sanctuary seekers to achieve their potential in our city. The group has marks Refugee Week every June as a celebration of their work and continues to build a network across Southampton.

Two big achievements that City of Sanctuary Southampton have achieved are:

* Over 15 schools in the city have been awarded School of Sanctuary status for their work to learn about refugees and asylum seekers, provide a welcome to sanctuary seekers and sharing that knowledge with others.
* In July 2017 Southampton City Council endorsed a pledge to formally recognise Southampton as a City of Sanctuary, receiving support from both the Labour and Conservative Council members.

After fleeing war, torture and persecution in their countries of origin, many people will face ongoing hardships in the UK while stating their claim for protection. This year’s Sanctuary in Parliament event will focus on working towards a fairer, more compassionate system for people seeking sanctuary in the United Kingdom. I believe that a fairer, more compassionate system is one in which no-one is detained without knowing when they will be released; it is the ability to enjoy a family life with loved ones and the realisation of the legitimate aspiration to provide for oneself and one’s family and to contribute to society through employment.

The event is being hosted by The APPG for Refugees and the chair, Thangam Debbonaire MP will open this session at about 12:15 and at 12:30 a panel of cross-party MPs and refugees will be discussing the above issues. This will be followed by a Q&A and there will also be opportunities to hear directly from refugees themselves.

I believe that 2018 provides an important opportunity to advance these issues. The forthcoming Immigration Bill, expected towards the end of this year, will reform policy on immigration in the United Kingdom in an unprecedented way. Concurrently, the scandal over the treatment of the Windrush generation has brought greater awareness of the impact of the Government’s “hostile environment” policy and the Home Office’s burdensome bureaucracy on individual human lives. I believe that the public response to the scandal is indicative that the vast majority of the public would prefer government policies towards a welcoming environment, especially for those fleeing violence and persecution.

I do not want sanctuary seekers to be forgotten in the midst of the fundamental rethink of the immigration system and I hope you can attend to have a dialogue with representatives from our city about some of the most harmful practices currently inflicted on people seeking sanctuary.

I can arrange for you to be sent a more detailed programme nearer the time, but in the meantime it would be great if you could me know that you have been able to put this into your diary. There will be a representative from City of Sanctuary Southampton present to talk to you on the day if you are able to attend, and answer your questions.

I hope you will be able to join the event on **Monday the 12th November**, even if only for a short while.

Yours sincerely

(*Add your postal address*)