

Information - Executive Order on Refugee Resettlement

County Responsibility

Local governments historically have had little say in refugee resettlement issues and therefore typically had very little information about the program. However, in September the President issued an Executive Order that requires affirmative action by a local government (defined as counties) to allow refugees to be placed within the county.

A letter from the chief executive officer is required to provide consent. The Board can take action by directing me to write a letter of consent or take no action. There is no need for a resolution or public hearing. If consenting, I suggest consent be provided “until withdrawn” so that future action is not necessary unless required by the Federal Government or the County desires to make a change. A county that takes no action will be considered non-consenting.

The Executive Order has been challenged in the courts. It appears the first hearing about the lawsuit will be held in late January. Other than a response to the Executive Order, local governments have no say about any aspect of the Federal Government’s refugee program.

The five refugee resettlement agencies in Minnesota wrote a joint letter to counties requesting a letter of consent from the County. There are 25 Minnesota counties that have received at least one refugee since 2015. Ten of those counties have given consent and most others will consider the issue in January.

Background Provided with the Request from LSS and Others

Below is the background provided by the five sponsoring agencies along with a letter requesting the County provide a letter of consent. We learned more about the pertinent dates referenced in the first sentence since the request. More information is provided later in this document about dates.

Important Information Regarding Refugee Resettlement and Executive Order 13888

Executive Order: On September 26, 2019, President Trump issued Executive Order 13888 (EO), which will go into effect within 90 days. Thus, starting on December 25, 2019, it is our understanding that refugees will not be permitted to resettle into a state or locality unless written consent is provided by the governor and a local official. According to the terms of the EO, both must consent. For instance, if a governor does not consent, refugees will not be permitted to resettle in that state. If a governor consents but the local elected executive official does not, refugees will not be permitted to resettle in that locality. In other words, failure to provide consent from either the governor or local officials, will result in a severe disruption to the lives of refugees and their families and would threaten the long term stability of the refugee resettlement program.

Background: The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) was established by the Refugee Act of 1980, and is managed by the Department of State/Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Department of Health and Human Services

(HHS). Since 1980, refugees have successfully resettled across the United States with the help of communities, volunteers, local non-profits, and faith-based organizations.

Resettlement is a humanitarian protection tool developed by the U.S. and other countries as a last resort for refugees who cannot return to their home country and cannot rebuild their lives in the country to which they first fled. It is also an important foreign policy tool used to support U.S. allies, stabilize countries hosting large numbers of refugees, apply pressure on governments with poor human rights records, and bolster the U.S. reputation as a champion of freedom and human rights.

Refugees undergo thorough background screenings prior to their arrival in the United States. Refugees selected for resettlement are screened, adjudicated and processed for resettlement overseas, prior to traveling to the United States. The Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and National Counter Terrorism Center conduct thorough background screenings of all refugees prior to their resettlement in the United States.

Refugee resettlement agencies already work closely with states and local officials and community stakeholders. Existing law requires they conduct quarterly consultations with relevant state and local government officials, including the state refugee coordinator, state refugee health coordinator, local governance, public health, welfare, social services, public safety, and public education.

Refugee Family Reunification: States and localities that do not consent to resettlement will make it difficult for refugees to reunite even with immediate family members who are lawfully residing in the United States. A key factor in determining the location in which a refugee resettles is whether they have family already residing in that location. A refugee's ability to integrate into their new community is greatly enhanced if they are reunited with family or friends who can provide support as they adjust to their new home. Minor children seeking to reunite with a parent or guardian may be negatively impacted by a state or locality not consenting to resettlement. On a practical level, since refugees do not have to remain where they are initially resettled, a refugee resettled far from their family will likely move to be closer to them. Such a move could reduce a refugee's access to some initial services that are vital to their integration.

The Executive Order may allow for family reunification in a state and locality that has not consented to resettlement, but only for some - not all - spouses and children. Even those permitted would no longer have a local agency to assist them in the application process in states and localities that do not consent to resettlement. A state or locality failing to consent to resettlement will result in family separation or force resettled refugees to move in order to reunite even with their own spouse and children.

Additional information about refugee resettlement can be found at bit.ly/usresettlement and www.rcusa.org/who-is-a-refugee.

United States Department of State

The United States Department of State is ultimately responsible for refugee resettlement decisions. It considers its work as humanitarian by assisting people who are forced to flee their country because of violence or persecution.

One major decision the Federal Government makes every year is to determine the number of refugees that will be allowed to enter the country. The previous 38 year average number of refugees entering the U.S. was 85,000 – 90,000. In 2020, the allowed number of refugees will be an historical low level of 18,000. The State predicts there will be only 500 refugees entering Minnesota in 2020, down from a recent history high of 7,351 in 2004.

The Federal Government also decides who can enter the U.S. as a refugee. In previous years the Department of State would categorize and allocate who can enter based on where the refugee was located (which country or region). In 2020, the criteria has changed so that 10,500 are specifically defined into 3 distinct categories, leaving 7,500 in the category that previously defined all refugees. Looking into this change in more detail leads some to conclude there will be very few refugees entering the country in the near future.

Minnesota & County Numbers

Over the last 5 years, 25 Minnesota counties have had primary refugees arrive. More than 70% of the refugees are women and children. Approximately 95% of refugees placed in Minnesota are being reunited with family members already here. *In 2019, 848 refugees were resettled in Minnesota, with 22 placed in Stearns County. In 2018, 663 refugees were resettled in Minnesota, with 12 placed in Stearns County (see all counties in Appendix).* In the past ten years, approximately 1,300 refugees were placed in Stearns County. Local sponsors report that nearly all refugees placed in Stearns County are reunited with family - almost all immediate family. There is little information available to estimate the number of refugees moving to Minnesota or the St. Cloud area after initial placement elsewhere.

The State of Minnesota has a Minnesota Department of Human Services Resettlement Programs Office that receives Federal funds to operate and provide support to refugees. There are five agencies that have typically provided direct support to refugees – Lutheran Social Services (LSS), Catholic Charities, Arrive Ministries, Minnesota Council of Churches, and the International Institute of Minnesota. LSS is the most prominent local sponsor.

Sponsoring Agencies

The sponsoring entity connects the refugee with a “navigator”. The navigator assists the new resident with immigration paperwork and identification documents. The navigator makes certain the refugee is connected with necessities such as housing (including food, furniture, and other necessities), schools, adult education, social security benefits, jobs, health screenings, transportation and more. Each refugee is provided with \$1,175 to pay rent and other initial costs. The sponsoring agencies provide support for up to 90 days with the federal program. After the

90 days, some further support is provided by the Federal Government, the sponsoring agency, and the State of Minnesota.

The sponsoring agency receives \$1,000 for each refugee assisted. Thus, sponsoring agencies such as LSS rely on partners, volunteers, and donations to provide the required services. In fact, the Federal Government requires the local sponsors, such as LSS, to demonstrate existing and projected private resources because \$1,000 is not nearly enough to provide the necessary services. LSS officials note that the refugee resettlement program is a very small part of LSS's work.

The local LSS is part of a larger organization that will submit one application for Federal funding. Applications are due on January 21, 2020. While the applicants want county's consents before January 21, they are able to submit consent letters after the deadline. Thus, action by our Board in January, if it takes action, will be timely.

Process & New Executive Order

Refugees are put through an extensive vetting process and a health check prior to being approved for entry into the U.S. Refugees are provided a loan for travel expenses to get to the U.S. Upon arrival, the refugee is authorized to be employed and is given immediate residency. Upon arriving in the U.S. a refugee can move. Before the Executive Order, a refugee that moved would not lose the financial and navigation support. Under the new Executive Order, if the refugee moves from a consenting county to a non-consenting county, then the refugee will lose the financial and navigation support. Many refugee families have been separated for long periods of time. Thus, the desire to be reunited with family is stronger than the desire for assistance and the refugee will very likely immediately move to be with family.

Economic Impact/Federal Costs

There have been a number of studies documenting the economic impact of immigration and refugees. An often cited economic benefit is that immigrants are essential to the labor force and analysis shows that refugees are highly employed. Some opine that the cost of helping refugees is too high such as expressed by the Federation for American Immigration Reform. Most costs are borne by the Federal Government. More information can be found in studies completed but one must be aware of the mission and motives on either side of the issue of those expressing opinions.

Local Costs

In the past, County staff has provided the Board with an estimate of the costs of refugees to the County. Recall, costs were mostly related to public health screenings required by the Federal Government and monitored by the State and some interpreter costs. In 2018, Public Health spent \$31,481 assisting refugees which includes assistance and screening for people subjected to trafficking and enslavement. The County spent a total of \$161,000 in interpreter services, all of which cannot be attributed to refugees because the County provides interpreter services for ~16

different languages, most for citizens. Refugees can qualify, the same as any resident, for State and Federal public assistance programs administered by the county.

The Office of Legislative Auditor (OLA), in 2018, reported that two school programs – English Learners and Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) are programs sometimes accessed by refugees. However, the programs are not limited to refugees and there is some State funding to support the English Learners program. The OLA reported that in the 2013-2014 school year costs for the English Learner Services were more than the State support.

City governments in the St. Cloud area report no discernable costs associated with refugees or immigrants.

Further Information

Below, I have attached links to several documents recently provided to me by the State of Minnesota and others that provide further information on the refugee resettlement activities in Minnesota and the nation. You will notice that some (not all) of the summary above was gathered from these documents. The documents provide information about who refugees are, the vetting of refugees, the numbers of refugees entering Minnesota, the economic impact of refugees, and more information.

The link about the refugee security vetting will lead you to other pages about the refugee process.

The Office of Legislative Auditor completed a study in 2018 entitled “Fiscal Impact of Refugee Resettlement: An Assessment of Data Availability”. The researcher interviewed a number of people in the St. Cloud area and other Minnesota areas impacted by the resettlement program. The report offers some insight, but concluded that an accurate fiscal analysis (cost-benefit analysis) was not possible.

- [Resettlement Programs Office Fact Sheet](#) - Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2019
- [Refugee Security Vetting Flow Chart](#) - United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2018
- [Economic Impact of Immigrants in Minnesota](#) - American Immigration Council, 2018
- [Immigrants and Minnesota’s Workforce](#) - University of Minnesota, 2017
- [MN Economic Statistics for Immigrant / Refugee populations](#) - New American Economy, 2019
- [The Economic Impact of Refugees in America](#) (uses MN as a case study) - New American Economy, 2017
- <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/program-overviews/refugee-resettlement/>
- <https://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/sreview/refugee.pdf> - Minnesota Office of Legislative Auditor Report
- <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-enhancing-state-local-involvement-refugee-resettlement/> - Executive Order
- <https://thehill.com/opinion/immigration/373600-the-cost-of-refugee-resettlement-in-the-us-is-simply-too-high>
- <https://www.fairus.org/issue/legal-immigration/fiscal-cost-resettling-refugees-united-states>

Appendix



Primary Refugee Arrivals to Minnesota by County Federal Fiscal Years 2015-2019						
COUNTY	FFY2015	FFY2016	FFY2017	FFY2018	FFY2019	5 year Arrival Total
ANOKA	116	138	94	37	45	430
BENTON	2	15	19		1	37
BLUE EARTH	25	27	6	3		61
CARVER	1	5	2	7	1	16
CLAY	25	25	7	3		60
DAKOTA	14	40	20	21	19	114
FREEBORN	9	15	9	6	8	47
HENNEPIN	384	485	306	65	105	1345
KANDIYOHI	28	41	77	7	10	163
LYON	26	31	18	8	19	102
MOWER	18	42	15	22	30	127
MURRAY					4	4
NICOLLET	4	10	14	1	1	30
NOBLES	4		11	13	1	29
OLMSTED	87	133	93	26	38	377
OTTER TAIL	8	18	8		1	35
PIPESTONE			1			1
RAMSEY	1275	1287	682	447	524	4215
RICE	19	40	48	1		108
SCOTT	17	33	10	15	4	79
SHERBURNE		2		17	5	24
STEARNS	217	248	163	12	22	662
STEELE	9		7	3		19
WASHINGTON	3	3	3	5	9	23
WRIGHT	7	10	2		1	20
Total	2298	2648	1615	719	848	8128
Notes:						
- Counties not listed above have had zero primary refugee arrivals in the timeframe listed.						
- Numbers listed are based on federal fiscal years (Oct-Sept).						

Minnesota Department of Health
Refugee Resettlement in Minnesota by Country of
Origin¹ 1979 to 2018

<u>Country of Origin²</u>	<u>Total Refugees</u>
1) Somalia	23,990
2) Laos: Hmong	22,033
3) Viet Nam	15,074
4) Burma	8,549
5) Ethiopia	6,364
6) Cambodia	5,003
7) Laos: Other	4,927
8) Liberia	4,022
9) Bosnia	2,380
10) Iraq	1,561

¹ During this 40-year time period, Minnesota was host to a total of 109,605 refugees representing 104 countries of origin.

² These 10 countries represent the country of origin with the highest number of refugees who resettled in Minnesota during this 40-year time period.