



State Coordinators of Refugee Resettlement

August 26, 2009

Scott Busby
Director for Human Rights
Office of Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights
National Security Council
The White House
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Scott,

Thank you again for the invitation to SCORR and many individual state refugee coordinators to attend the White House refugee resettlement stakeholder consultation on August 5. We believe that this consultation represents the most serious and comprehensive look at all foreign and domestic aspects of refugee resettlement in well over two decades. We sincerely appreciate the high level of attention and urgency being shown to the myriad issues that were highlighted at the consultation. We look forward to an ongoing consultation process that gives as much attention to the domestic needs of the US Refugee Program as it does to the foreign needs.

At the initial meeting, many sectors involved in refugee resettlement presented observations on the need for reform. We wish to reiterate how much common ground there is in the position papers presented by SCORR, UNHCR, and RCUSA, and how much we support the positions advanced by these other organizations. Taken together, they represent a full range of initiatives that will help restore the capacity of the US Refugee Program to serve increased numbers of refugees with increasingly diverse needs, without overwhelming the resources of local receiving communities.

SCORR presented a set of priorities that broadly stated both problems and some suggested solutions. After listening to the direction of the discussion at the consultation, SCORR now provides additional and more specific suggestions for interventions that are organized according to a timeline for action. Immediate solutions focus on the infusion of funding that is needed now in order for states to meet our mandate to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency. Short-term solutions focus on the programmatic changes under current statutes that are required in order to serve the complex needs and secondary migration of an increasingly diverse arriving population. Long-term solutions focus on the programmatic and stakeholder changes under revised statutes that will move the focus of the US Refugee Program from early self-sufficiency to comprehensive integration.

In addition to this letter from SCORR, and under separate cover, you will receive letters and recommendations from many of the individual state refugee coordinators

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who were present at the consultation. These letters support the priorities and recommendations of SCORR, but provide even more specific local perspectives and recommendations.

On behalf of SCORR, thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this reform process. We look forward to providing additional details and elaboration for any and all of our recommendations, and to continuing the consultative process with the other stakeholders you have assembled.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Stein". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and "S".

Paul Stein
President, State Coordinators of Refugee Resettlement

Cc:

Eric Schwartz
Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration
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SCORR RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

1) Immediate Solutions:

- Ensure adequate funding levels for a minimum of 18 months that are based on actual costs to deliver the program results for various refugee populations, that are based on a uniform national benefit standard independent of disparate state levels for TANF or RCA, and that reimburse states for their share of TANF and Medicaid for the benefit period.
- Review the methodology used to calculate ORR formula funding to better reflect resettlement patterns and individual needs. Relying on arrival data from the previous three years does not allow the funding to match the current need. Prospective arrivals must receive equal weight in the formula allocations if the Refugee Admissions Program is to continue its welcomed expansion.
- Increase the Matching Grant Program (MGP) slots, with an increase in the federal contribution and a decrease in the local match. The MGP program is not available to all clients who could benefit and is regularly unable to serve qualified applicants about two-thirds of the way through the year due to a lack of funding.
- Provide dedicated funding to ensure that refugees have affordable housing while they wait for approval for public housing, Section 8, or other tenant based rental assistance.

2) Short-Term Solutions:

- Conduct a thorough review of the current programs within ORR (and continue the review process already begun by PRM), to determine which programs need expansion, modification or elimination, and what program goals are most meaningful and achievable. Particular attention needs to be paid to the Matching Grant Program (and the viability of the local match requirement) and to releasing the recommendations of the Integration Work Group. Furthermore, a review of best practices in all refugee services needs to inform the review and recommendation process.
- Establish clear program measurable and sustainable results that are derived from the mission of the U.S. Refugee Program. The results would provide additional transparency and accountability.
- Increase dedicated funding for ESL instruction, community orientations, life skills trainings, activities for parents and children on their adjustment to this new US culture, and education (language, academics, recertification, and credentialing), all of which will allow for increased levels of self sufficiency and employability.
- Increase dedicated funding and attention for refugee arrivals regarding their mental health and stability. Lack of culturally responsive trauma based care appears to hinder refugees' access to comprehensive mental health services. Ensure evaluation to develop best practices for refugee mental health, so that mainstream systems can adapt.
- Develop a uniform federal database for collecting data on refugees that would be shared with all resettlement agencies as part of their federal funding so that information can be collected in a nationally comprehensive manner. Currently, resettlement agencies and organizations are building their own data structures for collecting information and many critical elements of required federal

reports are being missed. Develop federally coordinated approaches for planning and conducting ongoing research and evaluation.

- Standardize health screening protocols to mandate what States must provide for newcomers within that screening. Mandate that the volags and the affiliates provide access to health care that includes being able to track that screening protocols have been met.
- Standardize community orientation programs locally, nationally and internationally that will allow all newcomers access to the same array of information. This system would need to develop curriculum topics as well as length of time for that orientation to take place.
- Standardize refugee resettlement programming. Through a thorough research of current best practices across the States a program can be developed that is more streamlined to meet the needs of new comers in an equitable manner in all States.
- Reserve dedicated funding and develop new mechanisms for rapid funding and program responses to emergency situations.
- Develop outreach to and partnerships with other federal agencies to ensure that refugees are included in their program strategies and target populations.
- Expand the P3 program with a particular eye toward employable adults (to help support the larger family).
- Ensure that core administrative funding for local volags is provided by the State Department and is calculated and assured through the annual PRM abstract process.
- Improve the planning and resource allocation for secondary migration. Currently the secondary population represents an unfunded mandate upon states and results in increased issues surrounding quality of services (both social services and health) as we are forced to serve a population exponentially larger than is acknowledged via the formula allocations. This situation places burdens on existing state services as well as creates another opportunity for receiving communities to find fault with the refugee community and results in further stress and tension between the refugee community and their host community. Recommendations include:
 - Implement a separate line in the ORR budget that is exclusively for counties impacted by secondary migration, similar to the TAG program, but whose formula looks back only one year and whose distribution of funds is throughout the year.
 - Use “Interests” to allow refugees more choice in where they will be resettled and reduce the number of refugees moving to join friends and families in other states (especially during the critical first few months of service delivery).
 - Provide the same services and assistance, no matter where refugees are resettled, in order to reduce secondary migration as refugees compensate for the state-to-state variances in assistance.
 - Develop a nationwide rapid response team that can be called upon to assist with critical interpretation needs (especially for less common languages) and health screening in areas that do not have a refugee resettlement infrastructure.

- Develop new mechanisms for providing secondary client data and information to key stakeholders such as states, volags, PRM, and ORR.
- Improve the viability and cost effectiveness of new affiliate or sub-affiliate offices under the Reception and Placement program to address what have become defacto primary resettlement sites where no infrastructures exist and there is no financial viability to develop capacity in those locations.

3) Long-Term Solutions:

- Revise the Refugee Act to provide an adequate safety net to offer a humane resettlement experience for refugees. To accomplish this, there needs to be a cash/medical assistance program that includes all refugees, regardless of family composition, for a period of no less than 18 months, and arguably longer. Cash assistance levels must be adequate to pay for safe and sanitary housing for all family sizes until economic self-sufficiency can be achieved. Cash assistance levels must not be indexed to TANF, and self-sufficiency must not be defined as TANF avoidance.
- Develop funding streams that work to support the continued acculturation and adaptation of refugees beyond the initial resettlement and first year of resettlement in the US, to allow for greater support of newly emerging communities, acculturation challenges, parenting, etc, in America's schools, cities and towns.
- Revise the Refugee Act to state that integration, not just early self sufficiency, is the goal of the Refugee Program, and develop more formal mechanisms for state and local mainstream partners to have a voice in and responsibility for program objectives.
- Review the law around refugees and immigrants, with a focus on how we can help families to stay together.
- Ease the road to citizenship with waivers for costly vaccinations and applications. Refugees are required to start the process of changing their status a year after resettlement, but the cost of adjustment can make it difficult for many. Later, the obtaining of US citizenship, while not required by law, is one required by the extensive health needs and social service assistance benefits that many refugees rely on, particularly the elderly.
- Eliminate the requirement for elderly or disabled refugees to naturalize as a condition of eligibility for SSI, and eliminate the nine-month limitation for refugees receiving SSI. In general refugees naturalize at a higher percentage than other immigrants. Achieving citizenship through the naturalization process is difficult, and age and disability are significant barriers that can prevent many of these vulnerable individuals to successfully naturalize. Elderly and disabled refugees who have been unable to naturalize within nine months should not be denied what is their only likely means of support.
- Provide states with maximum flexibility to develop new resettlement models or establish programs that are designed to achieve agreed-upon program results.