

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. 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 a mayor 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 to 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 with even 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