



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: State Senator Cory Tomczyk, Chair  
Members, Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government

FROM: Barbara Sella, Executive Director

DATE: February 6, 2024

RE: SB 916, Refugee Resettlement and Assistance

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to oppose Senate Bill 916, which requires additional consultation for refugee resettlement in Wisconsin.

I would like to begin by defining who refugees actually are. They are persons who have fled their homelands and who are either unable or unwilling to return because of a “well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

Refugees admitted to the United States have undergone the most extensive vetting of any new arrivals. No other immigrant group—those on travel visas, students, etc.—are scrutinized so thoroughly. Attached to my testimony is a copy of the U.S. State Department’s description of how refugees are interviewed, screened, and processed. What the description does not reveal is that on average it can take seven to ten years before a refugee is admitted to the U.S.

Large numbers of refugees are being reunited with family members in the U.S. Therefore, a bill like SB-916 has the unintended effect of delaying family reunification. Keeping families apart can hurt the ability of families to support themselves financially and can negatively impact the well-being of children, both emotionally and academically.

The United States is the wealthiest country in the world and as our Statue of Liberty declares, we are a nation that welcomes the “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” As Americans and as Wisconsinites, we have a moral obligation to help resettle some of the most traumatized and oppressed people in the world.

However, this resettlement work is not just a government responsibility. The Judeo-Christian tradition compels people of faith to “welcome the stranger” (Matthew 25:35). As Catholics, we are at the forefront of helping refugees find stable housing, gainful employment, English language proficiency, cultural orientation, and more. One of the

primary goals of resettlement services is to have refugees gainfully employed within 90 days of arriving in the United States. I can report that nearly all adult employable refugees served by our agencies are employed within that time.

Our Catholic agencies already meet with local elected officials on a quarterly basis. Please don't make their work more difficult by creating obstacles to resettlement. Instead, let's work together to make Wisconsin a leader in welcoming refugees and letting them know that they have a future in our great state.

For all these reasons, we respectfully urge you to oppose SB-916. Thank you.

## **U.S. State Department**

### **Refugee Admissions Application and Case Processing**

SOURCE: <https://www.state.gov/refugee-admissions/application-and-case-processing>

#### **U.S. Refugee Admissions Program: Overseas Application and Case Processing**

When a refugee applicant is referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for resettlement consideration, the case is first received and processed by a Resettlement Support Center (RSC). The Department of State currently funds and manages seven RSCs around the world that are operated by NGOs or international organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

#### **Adjudication**

RSCs collect biometric, biographic, and other information from the applicants to prepare cases for security screening, interview, and adjudication by **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)**. The Secretary of Homeland Security has delegated to USCIS the authority to determine eligibility for refugee status under U.S. law. The decision whether and how many refugees to admit to the United States each year is determined by the President. There is no minimum or fixed maximum number of refugees that can be admitted under U.S. law – and is set by the Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions. USCIS officers review the information that the RSC has collected, and the results of security screening processes and conducts an interview with each refugee applicant before determining whether the applicant is eligible for classification as a refugee.

#### **Post-Adjudication Processing**

If an applicant is conditionally approved for resettlement by USCIS, or in certain cases prior to receiving a decision from USCIS, RSC staff guide the refugee applicant through post-adjudication steps, including a health screening to identify medical needs and address any health concerns before individuals

enter the United States. The RSC also obtains a “sponsorship assurance” from a U.S.-based resettlement agency that receives funding from PRM for **Reception and Placement (R&P) assistance**. Refugees may also be assured to a private sponsor group through the Welcome Corps, which will provide initial resettlement services upon arrival rather than a resettlement agency. Once all required steps are completed, the RSC refers the case to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to arrange transportation to the United States.

### **Cultural Orientation**

The Department of State strives to ensure that refugees admitted to the United States are prepared for the changes they will experience by providing cultural orientation programs prior to departure. The Department of State funds one- to five-day pre-departure orientation classes for eligible refugees at sites throughout the world. Comprehensive cultural orientation resources have been developed to assist refugees’ transition to life in the United States, including a **Settle-In US website**, Facebook page, and mobile app. Cultural orientation programming continues once refugees arrive in the United States.

### **Travel**

The Department of State funds the international transportation of refugees to be resettled in the United States through a program administered by IOM. The transportation is provided to refugees through a no-interest loan. Refugees are responsible for repaying these loans over time through their reception and placement providers, beginning six months after their arrival.