

State Letter #10-09

Office of Refugee Resettlement Guiding Principles

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Topics: [Refugees](#), [Resettlement State Letter](#)

TO: STATE REFUGEE COORDINATORS
NATIONAL VOLUNTARY AGENCIES
OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES

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SUBJECT: Office of Refugee Resettlement Guiding Principles

As you know this year marks the 30 th anniversary of the Refugee Act of 1980 and the establishment of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). As we celebrate 30 years of service to nearly three million refugees from around the world and Cuban/Haitian entrants, ORR encourages you to reflect on the words of Joseph A Califano, former Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the guiding principles set forth by ORR in this State Letter.

Former Secretary Califano testified before the Congress in support of the Refugee Act of 1980. The excerpt from his statement as shown below emphasizes that our short-term investment in refugees yields significant and lasting contributions to communities across the United States.

“ . . . Just as our parents and grandparents enriched the United States, these new refugees are enriching this Nation. They are working hard, saving, trying. The burdens they place on our system of social services are manageable and temporary; what stands out is their eagerness to contribute.”

--- Testimony of Joseph A. Califano, Secretary, Department of Health, Education and Welfare, in support of the Refugee Act, May, 1979

ORR challenges each of you to consider former Secretary Califano’s words as you reflect on the last 30 years of refugee resettlement and plan for the upcoming years. Although Secretary Califano provided his testimony over 30 years ago, his recognition of new refugee populations, the need for government support and the significant contributions of newcomers to the United States remain true today.

As the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) celebrates its 30 th anniversary of resettling refugees, it sees new refugee populations of diverse nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. Many of these new refugees arrive with severe challenges (survivors of

torture, persons with physical disabilities, and victims of sexual assault) and some arrive in the United States after 10, 15 or 20 years in refugee camps. These refugees are arriving during an economic downturn, a time in which some may suggest the U.S. government should not be placing resources into a program that serves non-citizens. But as Secretary Califano stated, the resources needed to provide services to refugees are manageable and ultimately lead to the enrichment of our country.

ORR asks all organizations and individuals working with refugees to take this time, at the anniversary of the Refugee Act of 1980, to re-ignite their enthusiasm and re-establish their commitment to instill in refugees hope for the future and fortitude to build new lives in the United States. With this in mind, ORR wishes to share the guiding principles that it believes will provide the most effective resettlement and set the groundwork for the contributions of the next generations of refugees.

- **Appropriate Placement and Services.** Appropriate placement and services are essential to successful resettlement. ORR wishes to increase interagency coordination with the Department of State to ensure refugees are placed in locations where there are appropriate services and resettlement conditions. Appropriate placement and services from the onset will be a preventative measure against the challenges brought by secondary migration.
- **Client-Centered Case Management.** Resettlement services must be client-centered and responsive to the individual needs of the refugees. The resettlement program would be most effective if it assessed the diverse strengths, needs and goals of each person. We must respond to refugees with special needs, such as torture victims and 'warehoused' refugees, as well as the diverse groups of refugees arriving in the United States (e.g., Bhutanese, Iraqi, Burmese). Because the refugees arriving in the United States today have special and specific needs, ORR wants to tailor services for them through case management. By increasing case management, ORR will ensure that refugees are receiving the hands-on care that is critical to their chances of success.
- **Newly Arriving Refugees.** Resettlement services should focus on newly arriving refugees. ORR wants to front-load resettlement services so that refugees are empowered through early employment, reach self-sufficiency as soon as possible and become active, contributing participants in their communities.
- **Health and Mental Health Services.** Refugee health and mental health play an integral role in the resettlement process. It is critical for refugees to receive expanded health screenings overseas so that we have better information on the types and level of care they will need upon arrival in the United States. ORR plans to strengthen its partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Office of Consumer Information and Insurance Oversight (OCIIO) to ensure that refugees are aware of and have access to the benefits of the new health care reform laws.
- **Outreach.** Outreach across all levels of government, the private sector, and international, non-profit, and ethnic community-based organizations is paramount to cultivating productive relationships between the refugee resettlement community, our partners, and the public at large. In addition, ORR is planning an

outreach campaign within the federal government to identify potential opportunities for collaboration.

- **Data Informed Decision-Making.** ORR plans to increase the use of technology to develop data-informed programs and to improve knowledge and communication amongst all stakeholders. ORR intends to develop a data system that can track initial placements, secondary migration, resettlement services rendered, and performance indicators; automate some case management functions; and interface with ORR's many data sources.

As with every generation, it is inevitable that thirty years from now our successors will reflect on our attitudes, words, and actions towards refugee resettlement. It is not enough to repeat the thirty-year old strategies for refugee resettlement that we have become accustomed to. Rather, in order to keep in-step with changing world, ORR believes it is our collective duty to continuously challenge the effectiveness of our work and our commitment to refugees. In so doing, we will accomplish our duty of improving refugee resettlement as we pass the torch to the next generation of leaders in the field.

Thank you for partnering with ORR as we enter a new era of refugee resettlement.

Last Reviewed: May 8, 2019