

refugeecouncilusa

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Refugee Council USA
Voluntary Agency Affiliate Advocacy Packet

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Get Involved!

Ways You Can Advocate for Refugees

1. Reach out to your Members of Congress through phone-calls, in district and DC office visits, E-mails, letters, action alerts, and postcards
2. Involve your Member of Congress in local events
3. Involve community members in advocacy
4. Participate in Refugee Council USA's National Advocacy Calls

T h i n g s y o u c a n d o

- Invite your Senators or Representative to your agency to show off the successful programs of your organization. Arrange for a refugee to meet with the official.
- Have your Senators or Representative host an event celebrating refugees in your community. You could have ethnic restaurants sell food from booths, sell refugee made crafts, or have booths that explain the country conditions of where your clients are from.
- Host a multi-cultural refugee event.
 - Ask your Representative or Senators to co-host the event and arrange for participants to call-in to support a specific piece of legislation.
 - Examples: Pot-luck dinners, singing and dancing, mock-ceremonies (Asian wedding ceremonies, Ethiopian and Eritrean coffee ceremonies).
- If you are already planning an event, such as a job-fair, holiday party, celebration, fair, or fundraiser:
 - Ask your Senators or Representative to attend.
 - Organize a conference call to your Member of Congress or write letters/ postcards asking them to support more funding for refugees or an specific bill
- Organize a community service day for refugees and community members, which will help refugees network and help community members understand the refugee experience.
 - Ask your Senators or Representative to sponsor the event.
- Get youth groups involved in advocacy. Work with a local religious youth group, middle school, high school or college human rights related extra-curricular group to have youth collect refugee stories that would help advocacy efforts for a specific topic of legislation.
- Show a refugee related movie or documentary to raise money for your organization.
 - Invite your Member of Congress to speak
 - Have a letter-writing campaign about a refugee bill at the table where the audience buys tickets.
- Arrange a community forum about refugee issues with local politicians, your local Board of Education, the Rotary Club, and other governmental, non-governmental groups, and businesses. This event may serve as a catalyst to involve the entire community in helping refugees integrate. This is also a way to make decision makers and advocates aware of the issues that your clients are facing.
- Join Refugee Council USA's national advocacy conference call to stay updated on the issues in Washington. Resettlement agency staff and refugees can join, as can local stake-holders.
- With this information, you can help refugees arrange meetings with their Members of Congress, and have refugees take the information back to their ethnic communities.

Refugee Resettlement In-District Meetings

Establishing close relationships with your Members of Congress is crucial to enacting policies that keep up with the expanded needs of refugees. In-district meetings with your Members of Congress could make the difference in a vote for more funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. At these meetings, resettlement staff and clients can discuss the challenges and triumphs that new arrivals face. Note how important it is for the humanitarian migrants that we serve, who have fled violence and persecution, to find a safe home, stable employment, and a quality education. Ask the Member to help welcome refugees in your district by helping to ease their transition.

Purpose of In-District Advocacy Meetings on Refugee Resettlement:

1. To understand where the Member stands on the issue.
2. To understand the Member's interests.
3. To get a commitment of support for refugee resettlement.
4. To build relationships with public officials and institutions influencing our community.

Because the process of change takes time, lobby visits should be viewed as a part of a larger process of gathering information, building relationships and developing advocacy strategies.

B e f o r e y o u m e e t w i t h a M e m b e r

Have a plan

Before you enter into a lobby visit *always* meet before the meeting to assign roles. Roles should include who will introduce the group, explain the documents, who will take lead on each issue, who will make the "ask" and who will jump in if the conversation goes off-course.

The Credential

This is who you are and *who you represent!* You are more than 'a constituent'. You are a constituent who represents other constituents back home and you'll report back to them. Remember, politicians pay attention to numbers.

The Team Work

It is important to follow the plan you set during the pre-meeting. Of course you'll need to be flexible and allow participants to supplement others as needed.

The Ask

Why just tell them what you want – Ask if they'll support you! "Can we count on the Senator's support on this measure?" Listen carefully and ask for clarification if what they say is vague.

The Debrief

It's important to make sure we're on the same page leaving the meeting. As a group, review: What did we hear? Did we get what we wanted? What are the next steps? And it's important to help us get better to evaluate the group. How did we do? As a team? As individuals?

Follow these easy steps to ensure your visit impacts how they will vote on refugee-related issues:

- 1.) **Find out who represents you in Congress.** Go to www.senate.gov and www.house.gov to find out who your Senators and Representatives are.
- 2.) **Know your audience.** Find out how your Senators and Representative voted on immigration and refugee issues. Members' websites and a "Google" search will show how they vote and what they have said about refugees.
- 3.) **Schedule a meeting.** Call, E-mail or fax the local offices of your Senators and Representatives to request a meeting. If the member is unavailable, ask to meet with a staffer who works on refugee or immigrant issues.
- 4.) **Tell your story.** You're a constituent, and therefore your Senators and Representatives care about what you think. Tell them why you care about refugee policy; how it impacts your community and those you care about. Your story is the most important part of the visit.
- 5.) **Bring facts.** Support your opinion with fact sheets provided by your DC advocate calling for refugee policy that allows recent refugees, men, women and children fleeing violence and persecution, to find a home and stable jobs and schooling.
- 6.) **Ask for support and leadership.** Ask what their position is on refugee funding and how they will champion reform. Even if they don't agree with everything you discuss, ask how they will champion the pieces that they do agree with.
- 7.) **Follow up.** Send the staff you meet with an E-mail thanking them for their time, attaching any documents you mentioned, answering any questions that you were unable to answer during the meeting, and once again making your case for humane and equitable refugee policy.
- 8.) **Call Washington, DC.** The Capitol Switchboard (202) 224-3121 can connect you to the DC offices of your Senators and Representatives. Introduce yourself as a constituent and ask for the staffer who works on refugee or immigration issues. Tell them about your meeting with their local office, ask what they are doing to champion the rights of refugees and urge them to support increased funding for refugees.
- 9.) **Build a relationship.** Call these local and DC staff persons regularly to discuss refugee resettlement issues and how your Senator or Representative is voting on the issue. Let them know about events that show your community cares about refugees and legislation you would like them to support.
- 10.) **Get others involved!** Get a group of colleagues to visit the local office of your Senators and Representatives about refugee issues. You can even write a letter to your local newspaper or call your local radio station about these issues.

Refugee Resettlement Phone Calls to Congress

Calling the offices of your Members of Congress could make the difference in a vote for more funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. With these personal calls to staffers with immigration and refugee expertise, resettlement staff and clients can discuss issues that face new-arrivals and show constituent support for bills in Congress. Note how important it is for the humanitarian migrants that we serve, who have fled violence and persecution, to find a safe home, stable employment, and a quality education. Ask the Member to help welcome refugees in your district by legislatively helping to ease their transition.

Purpose of Refugee Resettlement Phone Calls to Congress:

1. To understand where the member stands on our issues.
2. To understand the member's interests.
3. To get a commitment of support for refugee resettlement.
4. To build relationships with public officials and institutions that influence our community.

B e f o r e y o u c a l l C o n g r e s s

- Find out on which congressional committees the member of Congress sits. If s/he sits on the Appropriations Committee, determine if s/he sits on the Labor / Health and Human Services Subcommittee, which funds ORR, or the State Foreign Operations Subcommittee, which funds PRM.
- Research the member of Congress to see if they have supported refugee or immigrant related issues before. You can draw from legislation, their website, speeches or other information found on the Internet.
- Be prepared to give your mailing address or zip code, so they can ensure you are a constituent. If your office is not in the district of the member you are calling, you may want to tell them that you serve refugee clients in or near their district.
- Be prepared to share specific facts and figures about your office, services your agency provides, as well as a brief and compelling story about a refugee you have assisted.
- Review the RCUSA one-page document and longer background materials on the MRA and ORR accounts.
- Have a pen and paper ready to write down the name of the staffer with whom you speak, his/her contact information and any relevant notes from the call.
- Let your DC advocacy staff person know that you called or met with your member, so they can remind the member's staff that your organization has met with their local staff.

Calling Congress

Once you are fully prepared, you can use the sample script below to guide you in your phone call. Remember to be yourself! It is easy to sound rehearsed if you just read this document. By preparing, you can really show your passion for refugee-related issues and establish a warm connection with staffers over the phone.

Sample Script

You: Hello, my name is [name] and I'm calling from [name of town]. May I please speak to the staffer who handles refugee issues for [Representative/Senator] [name of member of Congress]?

Receptionist: Sure, his/her name is [staffer's name]. I'll connect you. (*Write down the name. If you are transferred to voicemail, see the script below, "Script for voicemail."*)

(NOTE: If they do not have a staff member who handles these issues, ask for someone who handles appropriations, immigration, or international issues for the member.)

You: Hello, my name is [your name] and I am the [position title] at [name of resettlement agency] in [name of city]. I am calling to ask for your boss's support in increasing FY 2011 funding for overseas refugee assistance and the domestic refugee resettlement program in the United States. My agency resettles and provides services to refugees in [name towns/cities in the member's district]. [Describe your agency's resettlement program and discuss positive impact refugees have on communities in or near the member's district.]

There are two appropriations accounts that help my agency serve [give number of refugees your agency serves annually] vulnerable refugees every year. I am calling to urge [Representative/Senator] [last name] to support:

- **\$2.31 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account of the State Foreign Operations spending bill.** This account provides funding to support the work of international relief organizations, including U.S.-based charitable agencies, that are providing humanitarian assistance and protecting refugees from further harm. It also provides my agency with temporary funding to help refugees during their transition to the United States.
- **\$987.9 million for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) account of the Labor/HHS spending bill.** This funding would enable my agency to respond to increased needs for job training, social services, and health services, among other programs that help refugees and other humanitarian migrants achieve social and economic self-sufficiency.

You: Do you have any questions about these funding accounts? (*Answer any questions they have. If you don't have the answer, it's okay. You can call or email them later with the answer, since you'll want to email them information about both accounts anyway.*)

You: When do you think you will be able to speak with the Congressman/woman about this? When can I follow-up with you?

Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to contact me at [your phone number] if you have any questions about these refugee accounts or the U.S. refugee resettlement program in general.

Sample Voicemail Message:

Hello, my name is [your name] and I am the [position title] at [name of resettlement agency] in [city] and we help to resettle refugees in [name cities in district]. I am calling to ask for [Representative/Senator] [last name of member of Congress]'s support in increasing FY 2011 funding for overseas refugee assistance and the domestic refugee resettlement program in the United States.

Specifically, I urge your boss to support **\$2.31 billion for the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account of the State Foreign Operations spending bill, and at least \$987.9 million for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) account of the Labor/HHS spending bill.**

Increases in funding for these two accounts would enable the United States to honor its commitment to vulnerable refugees by providing them with protection and assistance overseas and help them achieve social and economic self-sufficiency once they are resettled here in the United States.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me at [your phone number] if you have any questions.

I look forward to your boss's leadership on these important issues.

A f t e r y o u c a l l C o n g r e s s

Follow-up with the congressional staffer via email to provide additional copies of materials and to repeat your ask for increased appropriations for the refugee accounts. This can also serve as an opportunity to respond to questions asked during the meeting.

Reporting Back to Advocates in D.C.

After you speak with someone from your Senator's and Representative's office, email one of the RCUSA member agency advocates with an update with relevant information. The DC advocates will then follow up with the staff person as the time for making funding decisions draws closer.

Tell the Story, Be the Voice

You can carry a powerful message to Congress by sharing your story about the challenges you face and the triumphs you celebrate in resettling refugees. The Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), of which our organization is a member, is joining forces to advocate for more federal funding for refugees. We need your help to be more effective at making the case for why Congress should better support the work you do. We are collecting stories about the work you do in helping refugees attain self-sufficiency. While we are always interested in hearing your stories, we are particularly interested in collecting stories that exemplify the following issues by:

- The effect of the economic crisis on refugee resettlement
- Challenges in finding affordable housing and/or employment
- Successful cases from the Match Grant program
- How your community has contributed to your work (religious and social organizations, businesses, etc.)

The stories will be used to advocate for refugees by strengthening the resettlement program. We welcome pictures, videos, writings, and any other material you can share with us.

Please send your contributions to your DC advocacy staff person.

Feel free to also contact us if you have questions or suggestions.

We need your help in bringing the impact of legislation to life. Thank you for your continued support and dedication.

Refugee Appropriations Fiscal Year 2011

Migration and Refugee Assistance

The principal line items in the Migration and Refugee Account (MRA) account are overseas assistance and refugee resettlement, including admissions and reception and placement. *We recommend a total of \$2.31 billion for MRA in FY 2011, including \$1.8 billion for overseas assistance and \$415.2 million for refugee admissions.*

Overseas Assistance: helps vulnerable refugees—the majority of whom are women and children—in dire need of protection, shelter, clean water, health care and education. This is the minimum level needed to support existing assistance programs for the displaced in Chad/Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Ethiopia, Thailand, Kenya, Nepal, Iraq, and other crisis areas.

Refugee Admissions: the United States has been a leader in resettlement internationally. Providing safe haven to refugees who do not have an option of returning home and are not welcome in their country of asylum has been an important feature of U.S. humanitarian policy. The reception and placement grant provides short-term assistance to refugees who have recently arrived in the United States, including money for rent, food, and other necessities. This increase includes an R&P per cap of \$1,800.

Office of Refugee Resettlement

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services administers assistance for refugees, Cuban entrants, asylees, unaccompanied alien children, and victims of torture and trafficking. ORR funds a variety of programs that offer employment services, English language training, citizenship classes, cash and medical assistance, and aid for victims of torture and trafficking. *We recommend a total of \$987.9 million for ORR in FY 2011 for an admission of 80,000 refugees.*

The three areas where increased funding for ORR is critical are:

1. **Funding for basic needs (cash and medical assistance, housing assistance, social services)**
2. **Helping gain employment and achieve self-sufficiency**
3. **Providing assistance for highly vulnerable refugees**

This proposed increase would accommodate the following:

- Housing Assistance: the proposed increase includes \$30 million in additional funding for housing assistance to help refugees avoid homelessness.
- Voluntary Matching Grant Program: additional funding to double (from 27,000 to 57,000) the number of refugees and other eligible persons who participate in the Matching Grant program.
- Intensive Case Management: The proposed increase includes \$11 million for social services to provide intensive case management for vulnerable refugees (disabled, serious medical cases, etc).
- Assistance for Torture and Trafficking Victims: additional funding to provide services to torture victims and for victims of trafficking in the United States. Funding for torture rehabilitation has remained static for several years. The result has been a demand for services that exceeds resources. In addition, ORR serves victims of trafficking and develops outreach activities to identify and help victims. After the enactment of Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) in December 2008 ORR will need additional funds to implement protection set forth in the new law.
- Unaccompanied Alien Children: additional funding for the care of unaccompanied alien children. This increase is necessary to enable ORR to fulfill mandates of the recently enacted TVPRA.

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Sample letter to invite a Member to visit your site

Month XX, 20XX

The Honorable XXXX
ADDRESS

Dear Senator/Representative XXXX:

I write to invite you to visit our office and learn about the welcome provided to refugees resettled in <STATE> under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) administered by the U.S. Department of State and Department of Health and Human Services.

Thousands of refugees are brought to the United States every year because they cannot return to their home country and do not enjoy basic rights in the country where they sought refuge. Hundreds are resettled in <STATE.> My organization, <AGENCY NAME>, helps these refugees by providing them with the tools of self-reliance: housing, job placement and employment skills, clothing, medical attention, education, English-language classes and community orientation. We help refugees integrate quickly into our community.

Our office in <CITY, STATE> has helped resettle <X number> refugees in the past year alone. Since the office opened in <DATE>, over <X number> refugees from <X number of countries> have embarked on a path to reach their full potential and enjoy safety, security, and a second chance in life.

In 2009 alone, 74,654 refugees received permanent protection in the United States. The USRAP was established by an Act of Congress in 1980 and is an integral part of U.S. foreign policy that is rooted in communities. The program is a highly successful example of public-private partnership, where federal assistance is augmented by funds raised by communities across the country. Refugees have opened businesses, revitalized towns, and become productive members of communities that welcomed them. Many become American citizens and see their children graduate from U.S. schools.

Sadly, this program is now in grave crisis. Lack of attention and inadequate funding along with the current economic climate, have undermined this program. We would like to discuss with you the steps that need to be taken to repair it.

We would be honored if you visit our office to learn about the U.S. Admissions and Resettlement program and the refugees in your <STATE/DISTRICT>. Others have found such visits enlightening and have been moved to learn more about our clients' struggles and triumphs as they work to rebuild their lives. They are a testament to the United States' long, proud history as a sanctuary for those who seek lives free from violence and oppression.

Sincerely,

Your Name