

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

November 30, 2015

The Honorable Bill Haslam
Governor
State of Tennessee
Tennessee State Capitol
Nashville, TN 37243-0001

Dear Governor Haslam:

As part of our ongoing conversation with Governors across the country regarding the refugee resettlement program, I am writing today to follow up on a Governors call I hosted on November 17.

On the call and in follow up conversations and correspondence, we have provided Governors a detailed description of the process for vetting refugees and we continue to believe the security vetting for this population is extraordinarily thorough and comprehensive. It is the most robust screening process for any category of individuals seeking admission into the United States. The process is multi-layered and intensive, involving multiple law enforcement, national security, and intelligence agencies across the Federal Government. Additional precautions have been added with regard to Syrian refugees and we continually evaluate whether more precautions are necessary.

Notwithstanding this thorough vetting process, I wanted to follow up on requests from Governors for more consistent and official communication from the Administration about the placement process.

To that end and given NGA's role as the collective voice of the nation's Governors on matters related to national policy, I am proposing establishing a new process through the NGA for the U.S. Department of State to accept individualized requests from Governors for more regular access to refugee resettlement information.

Upon receipt of a Governor's request, the State Department would compile a tailored report for the individual state submitting the request. The report would include information on refugees resettled during the prior month and fiscal year-to-date.

In addition, at the request of the Governor, the State Department would provide this information on a monthly recurring basis via a password protected website. The monthly report would include the total number of refugees resettled in the state broken down by nationality, age range and gender.

This proposal responds to Governors' input while protecting the privacy of refugee families.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are prepared to brief Governors on the refugee resettlement process and to discuss working together to improve the program at NGA's next convening. Additionally, the Secretary of Homeland Security is prepared to work with NGA to provide further information to Governors on the refugee vetting process and to discuss options for enhanced collaboration.

Finally, enclosed with this letter is a brief overview of the resettlement process here in the United States, as well as contact information for points of contact within the key Federal agencies responsible for administering and supporting the refugee resettlement program.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to maintain this successful program that over the last four decades has made the United States a leader in welcoming refugees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. McDonough", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Denis R. McDonough
Assistant to the President
and White House Chief of Staff

Overview of Domestic Resettlement Through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program

Since 1975, Americans have welcomed over 3 million refugees from all over the world. Refugees have built new lives, homes and communities in towns and cities in all 50 states.

For refugees in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program approved to be admitted to the United States, the International Organization for Migration, a State Department partner organization, arranges air travel to the United States. The Department of State works with nine domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to facilitate the initial placement of refugees into U.S. communities and provide transitional assistance to each refugee or refugee family. Every week, representatives from these NGOs use information on refugees approved for admission to the United States, which is sent by U.S.-funded Resettlement Support Centers abroad, to determine where within the United States to resettle each refugee or refugee family.

In making this determination, the NGOs work to match the particular needs of each incoming refugee with the specific resources available in a local community. For instance, if a refugee has relatives in the United States, he/she is likely to be resettled near or with them. The nine NGOs, which maintain a nationwide network of 304 affiliated offices in 173 locations, also take into account factors such as language abilities in the community, and housing and labor market conditions in their areas of operation. In addition, the NGOs take into account views expressed in regular consultations with officials such as State Refugee Coordinators, State Refugee Health Coordinators, public health, school, social welfare and other service representatives. These officials are able to receive information on the resettlement program through these consultations, and basic data on refugee arrivals is also provided through the public website, www.wrapsnet.org.

As concerns support for resettled refugees, federal government funds, from the Department of State and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), supplemented by funds and in-kind contributions from private sources help to cover transitional assistance for the initial months after arrival in the United States. Additionally, representatives of the non-governmental organizations welcome refugees at the airport, find safe and affordable housing, and provide a variety of other services to promote early self-sufficiency and cultural adjustment. This includes providing basic furnishings, clothing, food, assistance in applying for social security cards, registering children in school, helping refugees learn how to access public transportation and grocery stores, arranging medical appointments, and connecting refugees with employment, English language classes, and other services. HHS also works through the states and with NGOs to provide longer-term cash and medical assistance, as well as English language, employment, and social services.

Through the collaborative effort of several components of the federal government, a range of NGOs, including faith-based NGOs, countless everyday Americans, and state and local leaders all over the country, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has sustained decades of success in ensuring that refugees achieve their potential in the United States and become integrated members of our communities. Inquiries from state and local officials about the program and related procedures can be directed to Lawrence Bartlett, Director of Admissions in the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BartlettLE@state.gov) or to Robert Carey, Director for the Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Service's Administration for Children and Families (Robert.Carey@acf.hhs.gov).