

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

DECEMBER 3, 2019

**Los Angeles County Welcomes Refugees**

Refugees are people who have been displaced in their country and forced to seek refuge in other countries because they have a well-founded fear of persecution, war, or violence in their own country due to race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. They are also our neighbors. When they come to the United States, refugees become part of our country’s fabric, contributing to the economy and society at large. The very foundation of the United States is linked to the many contributions of immigrants, including refugees.

Refugee resettlement to the United States is available only for those who demonstrate the greatest and most immediate need for protection. This includes unaccompanied minors and other children who are at risk. It extends to female-headed households, victims of torture, people with physical disabilities, and members of minority groups experiencing oppression in their home countries. Refugee resettlement only takes place after eligible refugees undergo a rigorous selection, security vetting, and

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medical screening process.

However, immigrant communities have lived in increasing fear in recent years. This fear extends to people in other countries, who were once able to seek safety in the United States, but are now met with the harsh reality that they will be turned away at the border or unwelcomed even if they are successful in their crossing.

In fact, there has been a plummeting number of newly-arrived families in recent years, as the federal administration has reduced the number of refugees admitted each year. In fiscal year 2020, for example, the federal administration will cap the number of refugees at 18,000—the lowest cap since the program launched in 1980. Moreover, 18,000 is a maximum cap and not the actual number of refugees who will be admitted, which is likely to be even lower. By comparison, the cap was 30,000 in 2019, 45,000 in 2018, and 110,000 in 2017. Furthermore, President Trump recently issued Executive Order 13888, "Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement," which for the first time instructs the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health and Human Services to seek written consent from state and local governments before they can accept refugees in their jurisdictions.

In Los Angeles County (County), the effect of these policies has permeated many aspects of our residents' daily living. County employees and partner service providers are faced with the difficult reality that it is harder to engage these communities because of the uncertainty created at the federal level. Additionally, immigrants are participating in public benefits programs at lower rates because of the federal administration's proposed changes to the public charge rule.

The Refugee Employment and Acculturation Services (REAS) program, operated

by the Department of Public Social Services, is one such program. REAS provides for the effective resettlement of refugees and assists them in achieving economic self-sufficiency for up to 60 months after arrival in the United States. Refugees are provided with services like employment, training, educational, and other specialized services to foster their success. Despite the program's importance, client participation has decreased nearly 70% since December 1, 2016. As of February 2019, REAS had only 585 participants, which is 1,315 participants below the contract projected caseload of 1,900 participants.

Although the main factor affecting the caseload reduction is attributed to the corresponding decrease in the number of refugees coming to the United States, eligible refugees may be opting not to participate due to fear that doing so may negatively affect them and their families. The County must work to ensure that all eligible refugees participate in REAS, as well as in other County services available to them and their families to ensure they are supported.

Additionally, without accepting the validity of Executive Order 13888, it is important that the County affirm its commitment to welcoming refugees and its opposition to the drastic cuts on the number of refugees admitted to the United States. The federal administration should not dictate the livelihood of refugees through arbitrary caps – and Los Angeles County must do all possible to counter that harm.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Declare that Los Angeles County is a Welcome County and affirm the support of resettling refugees no matter their race, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, nationality, or country of origin;

2. Instruct the Chief Executive Office, in coordination with impacted departments, to send a five-signature letter to the Secretary of the Department of State and the Secretary of the Department of Health & Human Services affirming Los Angeles County's participation in the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and the Board of Supervisors' consent to initial refugee resettlement in Los Angeles County, as per the terms of the Executive Order on Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement, until the Board of Supervisors directs otherwise; and
3. Direct the Department of Public Social Services, in collaboration with the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs' Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Department of Workforce Development, Aging, and Community Services, and community-based organizations, to develop and implement a linguistically, culturally, and immigration-sensitive Refugee Outreach and Education plan to serve refugees eligible for REAS.

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