

November 14, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Committee
2308 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Senate Appropriations
Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Committee
2413 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Congress Must Support Office of Refugee Resettlement and Key Refugee Accounts in Upcoming Spending Negotiations

Dear Chairwomen Murray and Granger, Vice Chair Collins, and Ranking Member DeLauro:

The undersigned **81** organizations dedicated to protecting refugees, asylum seekers, and all those who have been forcibly displaced write to express concern over the increasingly dire situation for key refugee accounts – a situation which will lead to historic cuts without immediate congressional intervention. With increasing forced displacement around the world and a growing mandate for services to meet basic needs in the United States, as well as humanitarian and refugee assistance, **we call on congressional leaders to replenish funds for these accounts in upcoming spending negotiations.**¹

At the end of Fiscal Year 2023, [an unprecedented 114 million](#) people have been forcibly displaced worldwide, including over 37 million refugees. The United States has long been a leader in supporting humanitarian needs around the world, support that saves lives, promotes human dignity, and advances diplomatic and security interests. The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is growing with [strong support](#) from Americans across demographics and political affiliations.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement – funded by the [REA account](#) – is a program within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that supports the long-term integration and economic success of certain newcomers, including refugees, unaccompanied children, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Afghan and Ukrainian parolees, [Cuban and Haitian entrants](#), and others. Federal REA funding for ORR goes directly to states and local communities through initiatives like the [Refugee School Impact Program](#), which supports local schools in providing integration services to their refugee students.

ORR has served an increasing number of individuals – and is present in an increasing variety of communities – in part due to [record arrivals](#) of eligible Cubans and Haitians in states like Florida, Kentucky, and Texas. In FY 2024, ORR is projecting a 22% increase as compared to FY 2023 in mandated arrivals - in addition to ongoing services for those who already arrived.² But because the REA account has relied heavily in recent years on supplemental funding bills, a Continuing Resolution that extends only base-level funding found in the FY 2023 omnibus spending package would equate to dramatically slashing resources for the account and historic cuts to ORR programming.

Cutting funds to ORR will restrict access to needed services that support refugee self-sufficiency and unfairly shift the funding burden from the federal government to states and local communities welcoming newcomers. Without additional support, funding for [Refugee Support Services](#), which facilitate vital integration, employment, and health programs, is projected to become depleted by January 2024. ORR

¹ Relevant accounts include the Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA), the Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA), the Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA), and International Disaster Assistance (IDA) accounts, as well as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

² ORR projects 722,500 arrivals in FY 2024, including 40,000 asylees, 420,000 Cuban/Haitian Entrants, 125,000 Refugees and Amerasians, 100,000 Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, 35,000 Iraqi and Afghan SIVs who assisted the U.S. missions, and 2,500 victims of trafficking. This compares to FY 2023 preliminary actual arrivals of 594,160 total.

will also be unable to achieve its goal of providing post-release services to all arriving unaccompanied children without supplemental funding – leaving many of the most vulnerable individuals attempting to navigate the U.S. immigration system without support.

With anticipated arrivals of approximately 12,000 Ukrainians during the current CR period, the [gap in enrollment of services](#) for those who arrive after September 30th has been incredibly disruptive, placing Ukrainians we have pledged to protect at risk. Think of Ukrainian women who are pregnant, arriving without their husbands, and need access to medical care; consider older Ukrainians with particularly acute health needs and Ukrainian children who need help integrating in school. Sponsors are here to help Ukrainians when they first arrive -- but when there is no medical or integration assistance, we are leaving them in need and without support.

Funding for State Department accounts that support refugees and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is also running dangerously low. The MRA and ERMA accounts are the backbone of U.S. humanitarian assistance efforts to refugees overseas. MRA supports the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), which not only funds overseas support for those who have been displaced, but also strengthens refugee processing, bolsters family reunification efforts and provides initial welcome services for refugees resettling around the U.S. ERMA is an [emergency drawdown account](#) that allows the U.S. to respond quickly to new and unanticipated crises, providing life-sustaining food, shelter, health care, and support to refugees around the world. The fund was used to great effect to support Afghans and U.S. partners following the fall of Kabul in 2021, and it has [recently supported](#) the response to earthquakes in Syria and Turkey, as well as efforts to address rising displacement in the Western Hemisphere.

Recent drawdowns have left ERMA fully depleted and unable to respond to emerging crises. Ongoing cuts to MRA represent an abdication of U.S. leadership and are set to endanger millions of lives and undermine our foreign policy and national security objectives.³

As Congress negotiates funding legislation this fall, we urge you to prevent historic cuts and bolster funds for ORR, including by supporting the **\$2.334 billion** for REA in the White House's October supplemental request. With respect to ORR, we further urge you to include retroactive language that lives up to our promises to those fleeing Ukraine and Afghanistan – restoring access to services [suddenly cut off](#) after the Continuing Resolution signed into law on September 30th. We urge you to restore funds for international assistance and to address delays in the refugee pipeline, including by supporting the **\$4.345 billion** for MRA found in the October supplemental request as well as **\$100 million** to restore funds to the ERMA account. We endorse the White House's recent supplemental request of **\$5.655 billion** for the IDA account and **\$755 million** for USCIS to address refugee and asylum processing backlogs. More detailed funding requests are [available here](#).⁴

Providing humanitarian support and welcoming newcomers is part of what makes this country strong. There is no doubt that failure to support these life-saving accounts will have a direct impact on communities across the country and on millions of refugees here and overseas. It is likewise imperative that [asylum restrictions](#) and anti-immigrant border policies [remain excluded](#) from any funding deal, as those provisions would undermine pathways to protection and place vulnerable people in danger. We urge you to invest in our capacity to save lives and welcome all those fleeing violence and persecution.

Sincerely,

³ It is also important to complement this funding with support for the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account administered by the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance within USAID that funds humanitarian assistance in displacement crises, preventing displaced people from fleeing their home countries and becoming refugees -- as well as with support for USCIS to continue adjudicating humanitarian cases, digitizing processing and instituting other technological advancements, and having a direct impact on swiftly reuniting families and providing employers access to additional workers amid crippling labor shortages.

⁴ Additional priorities specific to [newcomer housing access](#) and [unaccompanied children](#) are linked here.

Acacia Center for Justice
Afghans For A Better Tomorrow
African Communities Together
Alliance of Baptists
America's Voice
Ascend - Leadership Through Athletics
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC
Bethany Christian Services
Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants (CERI)
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Centro De Trabajadores Unidos - United Workers Center
Church World Service
Climate Refugees
Coalition on Human Needs
Community Supported Film
Disciples Home Mission
Dominicans Sisters of Sinsinawa
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
East Bay Refugee and Immigrant Forum
ECDC
Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc.
Families For Freedom
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project
Freedom Network USA
HIAS
Human Rights First
Immigration Equality
Immigration Hub
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
International Rescue Committee
IRIS-Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services
Jesuit Refugee Service/USA
Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley
Journey's End Refugee Services
Justice in Motion
Kids in Need of Defense
Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
MomsRising/MamásConPoder
National Association of Social Workers
National Council of Churches
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
Oasis Legal Services
Oxfam America
Partners In Health
Presbyterian Church U.S.A.
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
REACT DC, Inc.
Reformed Church in America
Refugee Council USA

RefugeeOne
Refugees International
Santa Cruz Welcoming Network
Showing Up for Racial Justice
Soccer Without Borders
Sojourners-SojoAction
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Tahirih Justice Center
The 5ive Pillars Organization
The Episcopal Church
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI)
Ujima Adult and Family Services
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Methodist Committee on Relief
Voice for Refuge Action Fund
We Are All America (WAAA)
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center
Witness at the Border
Women's Refugee Commission
World Relief
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights