

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 29, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary  
Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

Congratulations on your confirmation and extraordinary new position.

We write as the Ranking Members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees and Immigration Subcommittees. We urge you to immediately revoke the stop work orders that the Department issued on January 24, 2025, to the 10 national resettlement agencies that provide services to refugees who were forced to flee their home countries in order to escape war or persecution and were deemed eligible to resettle in the United States after undergoing thorough vetting.<sup>1</sup> This unprecedented order threatens to deprive refugees already in the United States of the vital assistance known as Reception and Placement (R&P) services, which help them during their first three months in the United States as they rebuild their lives here.

More than 32,000 refugees have arrived through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) to the United States since the start of FY 2025, thousands of whom remain eligible for R&P services. This is on top of the approximately 10,000 Afghan nationals who are in the U.S. on Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), which they received after risking their lives to assist U.S. troops and U.S. government efforts in Afghanistan; these SIVs also remain eligible for such benefits.

The stop work orders undermine legal obligations that the Department has entered into through its contracts with U.S.-based and intergovernmental organizations, increasing new arrivals' vulnerability to homelessness and food insecurity at a time when they still have no lifeline for support. The R&P program covers basic needs like rent, food, clothes, and furnishing in the first few months after arrival, providing core services for refugees who often resettle with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. Barring R&P services, including Virtual R&P available to self-traveling SIVs, will cause undue and unnecessary suffering and hardship, breaking a promise we made to the refugees and SIVs when we approved them for resettlement in America.

Furthermore, the stop work orders are purportedly being issued as part of the Administration's 90-day moratorium on "foreign development assistance." But the R&P program is *not* "foreign development assistance" by any stretch of the imagination. R&P dollars are spent on refugees *in the United States*, to facilitate their entry and assimilation into *our country*. By accessing the minimal but critical support services offered through the R&P program, refugees build a foundation for a successful new life in America.

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<sup>1</sup> Priscilla Alvarez, *Advocate Groups Ordered to Stop Aiding Refugees Who Have Already Arrived in US*, CNN (Jan. 25, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/01/24/politics/refugee-benefits-afghans-halt-trump-administration/index.html>.

These actions are particularly troubling given your previous support for the refugee program. In August 2019, you joined a letter addressed to the Trump Administration in strong support of the refugee resettlement program.<sup>2</sup> You also led the World Refugee Day Resolution in 2015.<sup>3</sup> In support of the World Refugee Day Resolution, you stated: “Recent conflicts and persecution, especially religious persecution, have resulted in the largest number of displaced persons since World War II. The U.S. must continue to lead on this issue and work to ensure that refugees who flee war, torture and persecution are provided safe environments to live and thrive in.”<sup>4</sup>

These harmful stop work orders follow the President’s Executive Order on “Realigning the United States Refugee Admissions Program,” suspending the USRAP and grinding refugee processing and admissions to a halt, effective January 27, 2025. Beyond its powerful humanitarian logic, the U.S. resettlement program is a vital tool for advancing U.S. foreign policy and diplomatic interests. The sudden suspension of activities related to the program 24 hours later, even before the Executive Order’s effective date, threatens global security and countless lives.

During your confirmation hearing, you said: “Every dollar we spend, every program we fund and every policy we pursue must be justified with the answer to three simple questions: Does it make America safer? Does it make America stronger? Does it make America more prosperous?”<sup>5</sup> Unequivocally, the U.S. resettlement program does all three. Welcoming refugees and newcomers makes America safer and stronger. The United States has welcomed refugees, including Albert Einstein, Madeleine Albright, Gloria Estefan, Sergey Brin, and Wyclef Jean, among many others, who enrich who we are as a nation. A record number of community supporters have worked alongside resettlement agencies to welcome, sponsor, and support refugees and Afghan SIVs upon their arrival to the United States. The federal government found that over a 15-year period, refugees and asylees contributed over \$123 billion to the U.S. economy, including a \$31.5 billion net benefit to the federal government.<sup>6</sup> Our assistance to refugees strengthens America.

Therefore, we urge you to reverse course by excluding or granting a waiver to the R&P program from the definition of “foreign development assistance,” as used in the President’s Executive Order on “Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid,” revoking the stop

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from James Lankford, Senator, et. al., to Michael R. Pompeo, Sec’y of State, Alex M. Azar II, Sec’y of Health & Human Servs., & Kevin K. McAleenan, Acting Sec’y of Homeland Sec., (Aug. 5, 2019) (<https://www.lankford.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/doc/Lankford,%20Coons%20lead%20Letter%20on%20Concerns%20to%20Eliminate%20Refugee%20Cap.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> *Senators Cardin, Rubio Introduce World Refugee Day Resolution*, SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMM. (Jun. 18, 2015), <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/senators-cardin-rubio-introduce-world-refugee-day-resolution>.

<sup>4</sup> Id.

<sup>5</sup> *Nomination Hearing of the Honorable Marco A. Rubio, of Florida, to be Sec’y of State Before the Senate Comm. on Foreign Relations*, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong. (Jan. 15, 2025).

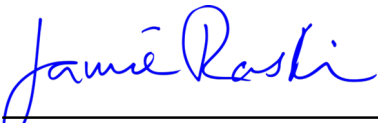
<sup>6</sup> Robin Ghertner, Suzanne Macartney and Meredith Dost, *The Fiscal Impact of Refugees and Asylees at the Federal, State, and Local Levels from 2005 to 2019*, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (Feb. 15, 2024), <https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/fiscal-impact-refugees-asylees>.

work orders, and permitting a resumption in R&P services for all eligible populations, including refugees and certain SIVs.

We also call on you to do everything in your power to swiftly resume refugee processing and admissions—and restore this life-saving humanitarian program that advances U.S. security, foreign policy work, and diplomatic interests.

Thank you for your swift attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



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Jamie Raskin  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on the  
Judiciary



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Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



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Pramila Jayapal  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on  
Immigration Integrity,  
Security, and Enforcement



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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator