

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**  
**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY**

**Subject**

Legislative Policy: Refugee Resettlement Programs

**Policy  
Number**

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**Purpose**

To establish the Board of Supervisors' legislative policy regarding issues related to refugee resettlement, and to provide guidance to the County's legislative representatives when advocating the County's interests to legislators, other elected officials and policy makers.

**Background**

The Refugee Act of 1980 provides a framework for:

- Admitting refugees of national interest to the United States through uniform provisions; and
- Authorizing federal assistance to resettle and promote the self-sufficiency of those refugees who are admitted.

Persons that are authorized to receive Refugee Resettlement assistance include:

- Refugee individuals who are unable to return to their country of origin because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion;
- Human Trafficking Victim individuals subjected to force, fraud or coercion for purposes of sexual exploitation or forced labor and have eligibility from the Office of Refugee Resettlement;
- Cuban/Haitian Entrants – nationals of Cuba or Haiti who are in the U.S. and are granted special status by the United States Customs and Immigration Service;
- Asylees – individuals in the U.S. and fear persecution if they return to their home country, and travel on their own to the U.S. and subsequently apply for asylum;
- Amerasians – persons born in Vietnam after January 1, 1962 and before January 1, 1976, fathered by a U.S. citizen;
- Afghan and Iraqi Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) – individuals that were employed or assisted the U.S. government.

Except for such unusual circumstances as the Director of the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) may recognize, the Act intends that refugees be initially resettled in areas other than those already highly impacted by the presence of refugees – unless they are being reunited with family members. In response to disparities in resettlement, since 1983, San Diego County has been designated as an area highly impacted by refugees, qualifying the region for additional federal funding.

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Federal funding for employment services is generally limited to refugees who have been in the U.S. for 60 months or less. While funding is available for the 60 month timeframe, the goal of the services is to help the recipient achieve self sufficiency within one year.

The federal government is responsible for funding and administering refugee assistance (cash and medical, employment, preventive health and matching grants). The State of California has given counties the flexibility to design and manage local refugee employment and refugee health programs.

Historically, inadequate federal appropriations have resulted in reductions in cash and medical assistance, effectively shifting the financial responsibility for many refugees to states and counties. Limited federal resources for refugee programs have adversely affected the ability of local governments to meet local needs.

The County of San Diego receives funding from ORR intended to help refugees seek employment and enable them to achieve self-sufficiency. The amounts received are inadequate and the restrictions on its use for services create challenges to meet the needs of the expanding refugee community in San Diego. The demographic characteristics of refugees in San Diego County present two types of challenges that could be better addressed with additional funding:

- Many of the refugees have limited English language skills, which makes it difficult to navigate application processes and creates difficulties in accessing services such as CalWORKs. The application process is made more complicated by the lack of translators available to assist the clients.
- A culturally competent approach is necessary to serve this population. For example, traumas they have faced in their country of origin require support to access specialty services such as behavioral health services. Many county and community programs are already underfunded, and the population of refugees and the need for culturally competent services is increasing with no commensurate increase in resources.

**Policy**

The legislative policy of the Board of Supervisors regarding issues related to refugee resettlement is to:

**Planning and Coordination**

1. Support a federal planning process that produces a national refugee resettlement plan, in advance of future refugee arrivals, utilizing input from the states and local government.

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2. Support coordination with all government and voluntary agencies to accomplish effective local refugee resettlement with a priority for family reunification cases.

Funding

1. Support 100 percent federal reimbursement of expenses incurred by local governments and agencies engaged in the refugee resettlement efforts.
2. Support 100 percent federal reimbursement for time expired refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, and secondary migrants.
3. Support incentive funding for localities that successfully integrate refugees into the local economy, removing them from public assistance rolls.
4. Support distribution of funding based on the refugee's current residence rather than his or her point of initial resettlement.
5. Support adequate and ongoing federal funding designed to reduce welfare dependency and increase self-sufficiency among refugees in impacted areas.
6. Support adequate and ongoing federal funding to meet the health needs of refugees in impacted areas.
7. Support and increase in targeted federal funding to effectively resettle refugees and aid in assimilation.
8. Support the establishment of a grant that would provide funding or appropriate funding from an existing federal discretionary grant to provide assistance to government agencies and community organizations in San Diego County heavily impacted by Iraqi refugees.
9. Support a change in federal procedure that would require the federal government to adopt outcome or results based contracting practices with the organizations they fund to provide refugee services.

Health and Education Services

1. Support health screening of newly arrived refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking to minimize communicable disease exposure in San Diego, identify

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conditions of public health significance, chronic illness, provide childhood vaccination, and evaluate health barriers to employment.

2. Support increased federal appropriations for health, citizenship education for elderly refugees, and bi-lingual services for local institutions/government (e.g., school districts, hospitals, and police departments) impacted by increases in refugees.
3. Support expansion of funding for continuity of culturally appropriate health care, behavioral health programs, family support services and community development.

Employment Services and Benefits

1. Support the promotion of early employment, including Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL)/English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs and short-term employment training.
2. Support the promotion of improved corporate relationships to facilitate refugee employment opportunities in private industry.
3. Support proposals that would avoid duplication of refugee services and encourage maximum coordination between agencies that serve the refugee population.
4. Support efforts to maximize the use of voluntary non-profit organizations, mutual assistance associations, and other agencies to achieve the goal of economic self-sufficiency and effective resettlement for refugees residing in San Diego County.
5. Support the evaluation of federal refugee projects for cost effectiveness.
6. Oppose priority service, eligibility advantages, or higher benefit levels for refugees over similar assistance programs available to U.S. citizens.

Responsible Departments

Chief Administrative Office  
Office of Strategy and Intergovernmental Affairs  
Health and Human Services Agency

Sunset Date

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-24.

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**References**

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