



Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
In Support of New York State Enhanced Services to Refugees
(January 30, 2020)

Dear Members of the Senate and the Assembly,

My name is Alana Pilar Cantillo and I'm the Senior Director of Advocacy for the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC). On behalf of the New York Immigration Coalition, a statewide organization representing over 200 non-profit organizations committed to advocating for New York's immigrant populations, we write to urge the inclusion of renewed and increased funding for the New York State Enhanced Services to Refugees Program in the FY 2021 New York State Budget.

The Enhanced Services to Refugees Program began in 2017 as a remarkable response to the federal government's retreat from refugee resettlement. New York did what no other state would: provide flexible state funds to support the state's strong network of resettlement agencies through a difficult time, and help them reframe their focus on integration. New York State allocated \$2 million for NYSESRP in fiscal years 2018, 2019, and 2020. Because of continued federal cuts in support for refugee integration, the NYIC as part of New York for Refugees—a coalition of 16 agencies resettling refugees and the Fiscal Policy Institute—is requesting \$5 million for FY 2021. The Enhanced Services to Refugees Program delivers measurable impact. In the past year alone, the program has provided nearly 8,000 unique services to refugees, including almost 5,000 case management/integration services, over 1,000 employment training services, and over 600 connections to English language training.

The Enhanced Services to Refugees Program allows agencies to concentrate on long-term integration in a way that addresses the needs of each client, unlike federal programs, which focus merely on the first 90 days of arrival. The flexible funding and extended case management approach allows agencies to provide deeper and broader support, benefitting refugees and communities. In challenging times, this program is continuing to establish best practices. The Enhanced Services to Refugees Program is a model for other states around the country. New York State was first: Oregon followed suit last year, and advocates in California are



exploring a similar program. New York for Refugees has received repeated inquiries about the program from advocates and service providers around the state and around the country, and the program receives substantial attention in local and national media. The state's two million dollar investment shows New York is committed to refugees and the agencies that serve them. This is critical, as over 50 refugee serving organizations in the United States have closed permanently, and over 40 have ceased resettling refugees, since 2017.

The Enhanced Services to Refugees Program is critical to successful refugee integration, is critical for Upstate NY, and exemplifies New York State's welcoming ethos. Attracting and sustaining support for the success of refugees is critical across Upstate, where refugees contribute heavily to economic revitalization and population rebound.

Refugee resettlement stems population decline and aging in Upstate New York, in some cases eventipping cities toward population rebound. The large majority of primary resettlement in New York is in Upstate communities (over 90 percent). Resettlement agencies also play a key role downstate, helping individuals reach their full potential in economic and social integration.

The Enhanced Services to Refugees Program attracts secondary migrants to New York.

Because of the state's support, New York's resettlement agencies and communities welcome people from Bhutan, Somalia, Burma, Afghanistan, Congo and other countries already in the United States to New York, which is particularly beneficial to Upstate cities. When refugee and immigrant communities are more prominent, it also attracts young people who want to live in vibrant and diverse areas. A strong network of services that support the success of secondary migrants is critical to positive outcomes for the communities they choose to live in. Without the state's Enhanced Services to Refugees Program, there is no statewide network.

This is a critical moment for the state to take action. The federal government has put the refugee resettlement program under even further strain this year, setting the Presidential Determination that governs the maximum number of refugees to



be resettled at a 40 year low of just 18,000 arrivals. Because this represents another devastating cut to agency sustainability, the New York for Refugees coalition is asking the governor and the legislature to increase support in the state budget from \$2 million to \$5 to make sure this vibrant program continues to achieve and expand its impact on residents and communities across the state.

We thank you for your time and attention to this testimony. For any follow up questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at acantillo@nyic.org.

Respectfully,

The New York Immigration Coalition