

**THE WHITE HOUSE**

WASHINGTON

January 12, 2011

Dear Senator Lugar:

Thank you for your letter regarding your report on refugee resettlement to the United States. We have reviewed the report with interest and urged relevant Federal agencies to carefully consider its recommendations.

I apologize for the delay in responding, but we wanted to have the benefit of agency inputs to your questions, which we helped to coordinate.

As you know, the National Security Staff is coordinating an interagency review of the U.S. Refugee Assistance Program (USRAP). This process has benefitted from input from all relevant Federal agencies, as well as other stakeholders. As part of this review, we are seeking to address several key issues: improved coordination among relevant Federal agencies and between the Federal Government and other stakeholders, increased resources to address the special needs of resettled refugees, and better definition and monitoring of program goals and outcomes. Separately, we have also led a review of screening processes employed in all immigration adjudications, including those in the USRAP. This review resulted in targeted modifications to security and background checks for the USRAP, which are designed to meet current security needs.

In terms of improved coordination, we have increased the frequency of interagency meetings and other consultations on refugee resettlement issues among relevant Federal agencies and with outside stakeholders. Relevant agencies have also implemented enhancements to the refugee placement process to facilitate greater information sharing among officials and organizations before placement decisions are made.

In terms of resources, the Department of State has doubled the per capita reception and placement grant from \$900 to \$1,800. The Administration has also requested an additional \$25 million in the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Fiscal Year 2011 budget request to address the emergency needs of refugees in light of current economic conditions. HHS has also reduced from three to two the number of past years used to calculate the formula funding for Refugee Social Services and

Targeted Assistance, which will bring Federal funding reimbursements to states into greater alignment with current flows of refugees. HHS is also examining current state funding arrangements to identify potential cost savings.

Because many of these changes are relatively recent or are pending (e.g., funding of the Fiscal Year 2011 budget request), their impact has not yet been evaluated.

In terms of legislation, the Administration intends to present a legislative proposal to the next Congress that would allow HHS to consider the number of prospective arrivals to receiving states as part of its formula funding for Refugee Social Services and Targeted Assistance. This would also bring into alignment the flow of Federal resources to the states with the number of refugees they are receiving. We support several provisions in the Refugee Protection Act of 2010 aimed at improving the program.

The National Security Staff has not attempted to coordinate a review of voluntary agency processes and practices. The Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration at the Department of State, in conjunction with state refugee coordinators and the Office of Refugee Resettlement at HHS, oversees regular review and examination of the institutional processes and practices of voluntary agencies to ensure adherence to best practices and that the program is sensitive to local community capacity.

We welcome your insights and support in improving this important humanitarian program, which, I know you agree, reflects the best traditions of the American people.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Donilon  
National Security Advisor

The Honorable Richard G. Lugar  
United States Senate  
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