

# Refugee Council USA

March 29, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Leahy:

On behalf of the twenty-five-member organizations of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) -- dedicated to refugee protection, assistance and welcome and representing the interests of hundreds of thousands of refugees, their families, and the many volunteers and community members across the country who support refugee resettlement -- I thank you for the opportunity to submit these funding recommendations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020.

RCUSA recommends FY 2020 funding levels of \$2.6 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services' Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) account, while also supporting the Administration's proposed \$2 billion contingency fund related to that account. We also recommend \$3.604 billion for the Department of State's Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account; \$1 million for the Department of State's Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA) account; and \$4.5 billion for the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account.

As you know, the REA account in the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) appropriations bill funds the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). ORR funding provides critical federal investments in the states and local communities that welcome refugees, and is a crucial component of fostering refugee self-sufficiency, integration, and economic contributions. In addition to services to new refugee arrivals, ORR provides essential programs for refugees who arrived in recent years, unaccompanied minors, asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, Special Immigrant Visa holders from Afghanistan and Iraq who served the U.S. mission in those countries, victims of human trafficking, survivors of torture, and unaccompanied children. Through ORR programs and associated public-private partnerships, these newcomers rebuild their lives and contribute to American communities across the country. RCUSA is deeply concerned about the proposed cuts to programs that help refugees learn English, find jobs, and successfully integrate in the United States.

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The United States promotes regional stability, furthers national security and foreign policy goals, and saves human lives through the MRA account in the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill, administered by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). Currently, there are more than 68 million forcibly displaced people around the world, including over 25 million refugees. We appreciate the particularly strong bipartisan support for this account, which provides overseas assistance to displaced refugees, supports refugee admissions, and funds lifesaving services in humanitarian emergencies. Through this account, the United States demonstrates its global leadership and values, while safeguarding its national security and foreign policy interests. The significant cuts proposed in the FY20 budget request send the wrong message about American values and influence.

Escalating violence and instability in many parts of the world have placed increasing demands on the ERMA account in the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill. As an emergency draw-down account that provides an important safety valve during emergencies, it allows the U.S. government to meet rapidly-occurring, unforeseen needs. RCUSA strongly opposes the President's proposal to eliminate the ERMA account, urging him to instead make use of the account, as his predecessors did. We commend Congress for maintaining the account fully in the last two years and urge a funding level of \$1 million appropriation in FY2020 as a sign of continued support for this account. This account ensures that the United States can continue to fund its humanitarian priorities even when unexpected events arise. It likewise assures a high degree of oversight given the Presidential draw-down requirement.

The IDA account in the State and Foreign Operations appropriations bill funds humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Sustained funding is required to respond to the needs of the growing numbers of persons internally displaced by conflict and natural disasters, particularly those inside Syria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Venezuela. This early and preventive assistance also helps prevent further displacement and regional strain. RCUSA is opposed to the Administration's proposed dramatic cuts to this account, particularly in light of the needs Congress has clearly recognized in its recent funding decision as recently as February.

Finally, RCUSA expresses its concern with the President's Fiscal Year 2020 (FY2020) budget request proposed to combine the overseas portion of Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account administered by PRM, the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account which is administered by Offices of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), and the Food for Peace account into one new account called the International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA) account administered by a new Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance within the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Currently, PRM uses the considerable tools of overseas assistance and resettlement to carry out its focused mission of protecting refugees and finding durable solutions to humanitarian crises. This proposal would reduce PRM's budget by 90% and take away the important tool of overseas assistance, which would reduce PRM's ability to leverage resettlement and overseas assistance for the benefit of regional stability and other U.S. foreign policy interests. RCUSA urges members of Congress to reject the Administration's proposal to bifurcate MRA funding and disempower the critical functionality of PRM.

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Now more than ever we must allocate funding to programs like these that align with our American values of freedom, compassion, and opportunity. Communities across this nation are voicing their support for refugees more than ever before recognizing them as a source of strength and great contribution. We urge you to continue your bi-partisan efforts to support refugees and the communities that welcome them. During this challenging and tumultuous time, we urge you to demonstrate support for America's leadership in the world and longstanding tradition of welcome by robustly funding these accounts during the FY 2020 appropriations process.

Thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William Canny". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "William" and the last name "Canny" clearly legible.

William Canny  
Chair, Refugee Council USA

cc:

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
The Honorable Patty Murray  
The Honorable Lindsey Graham