

# Senate Health and Human Services Committee

*Sophie Walsh 271-3469*

**HB 1706-FN**, repealing the refugee resettlement program in the department of health and human services and prohibiting expenditure of state funds on refugee resettlement.

**Hearing Date:** April 2, 2026

**Time Opened:** 4:18 p.m.

**Time Closed:** 4:53 p.m.

**Members of the Committee Present:** Senators Rochefort, Avard, Birdsell, Prentiss and Long

**Members of the Committee Absent:** None

**Bill Analysis:** This bill repeals the refugee resettlement program in the department of health and human services and prohibits expenditure of state funds on refugee resettlement.

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**Sponsors:**

Rep. Corcoran

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. Belcher

Rep. Berry

Rep. Drew

Rep. Erf

Rep. McFarlane

Rep. Noble

Rep. Osborne

Rep. Spillane

Sen. Ward

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**Who supports the bill:** 7 people signed in support of the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (sophie.walsh@gc.nh.gov).

**Who opposes the bill:** 52 people signed in opposition to the bill. Full sign in sheets are available upon request by contacting the Legislative Aide, Sophie Walsh (sophie.walsh@gc.nh.gov).

**Who is neutral on the bill:** No one.

**Summary of testimony presented:**

Representative Yury Polozov, Merrimack – District 10

- Representative Polozov stated that he is speaking in support of this bill as an immigrant.
- He emphasized that legislators' first duty is to their constituents. He questioned why we are housing immigrants when there are homeless veterans and working people who cannot afford to live in a nice apartment.

- He explained that he has a friend from Russia who came here with their children. The government was paying to host the family in two hotel rooms for the cost of \$14,000 per month.
- Representative Polozov explained that while this program does help refugees, it should not be our focus.

Nancy Rollins, Saint Andrew's – New London

- Ms. Rollins stated that she is speaking in opposition to the bill.
- Several years ago, Saint Andrew's was introduced to Overcomers Refugee Services. This program plays a vital role in providing guidance, language support, job readiness training, and basic necessities to refugees.
- Saint Andrew's provides funding to Overcomers Refugee Services as one of their outreach entities. These funds augment the federal funding in addition to any other donations that this program receives.
- Ms. Rollins emphasized that Saint Andrew's embraces Overcomers Refugee Services' mission to empower refugees to become successful, contributing members of society.
- Ms. Rollins noted that she is a former Associate Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and New Hampshire native. She said she has not come across a mean-spirited bill like this in her experience.

Amy Moore, Ascentria Care Alliance

- Ms. Moore explained that there was a lot of misinformation in the prime sponsor's testimony on this bill.
- She explained that while the refugee program is complex, it is truly federal funding coming through.
- Ms. Moore emphasized that refugees are the most highly vetted population that comes in to the country, noting that it is a multiple year long process.
- She said claims that refugees are a financial burden are not supported by evidence. She cited that they pay more in taxes than they get back.
- Ms. Moore explained that she has spent years working with refugees to fill in crucial workforce gaps, especially in health care. She emphasized that now is not the time to pass such legislation when the state is so desperate for that workforce, aside from the humanitarian side of things.
- Senator Birdsell asked if this is a federal program, and Ms. Moore confirmed.

Bill Gillett, Innocent Ndagijimena, and Zazie Sawyer, International Institute of New England

- Mr. Ndagijimena stated that he is speaking in opposition to the bill.

- He shared a personal story about his family's immigration to the United States as refugees. They came from a Congolese refugee camp in Rwanda, where he was born and lived for 18 years. His family was vetted for resettlement in 2014, and the process took nearly 3 years. When they arrived, they were supported by the International Institute of New England (IINE). This support allowed Mr. Ndagijimena to plan for and live a meaningful life. He earned a bachelor's degree while working full-time jobs and today he works for IINE.
- Mr. Ndagijimena emphasized that refugees are hard-working people who attend English classes and skill-training programs while holding full-time jobs.
- If passed, this bill will harm refugees and negatively impact New Hampshire's economy.
- Senator Long inquired about the process of being selected and vetted for resettlement.
- Mr. Ndagijimena explained that they were selected to come to the United States and began the process of interviewing and medical checks. They were eventually allowed to come, but it was a long process.
- Senator Long inquired about the duration of the vetting process, and Mr. Ndagijimena explained that it took his family nearly 3 years. He noted that for others it can take longer, depending on individual circumstances such as births or deaths in the family.
- Ms. Sawyer stated that she is speaking in opposition to the bill.
- Refugees are initially settled through a 90-day federal program separated from DHHS, during which they receive basic stabilization housing. She emphasized that refugees pay the same price for housing as everyone else.
- DHHS oversees continued support until citizenship eligibility at 5 years.
- IINE's contract with DHHS requires them to move clients toward economic self-sufficiency quickly, reducing and avoiding reliance on public assistance.
- IINE also helps families access child care and school options, so that all employable adults can work full time.
- Once stability is achieved, IINE connects clients to training for local workforce needs.
- DHHS provides strong oversight and accountability through annual audits. They also conduct monthly check-ins to verify employment status and ensure accurate reporting. This oversight is backed by federal oversight, creating a layered system ensuring transparency and compliance.
- This bill has no impact on the mechanism by which refugees come to New Hampshire, but it does remove a well-developed system with checks and balances.

- Mr. Gillett addressed the questions raised about salary and explained that salaries paid by IINE are in line with salaries paid by other non-profits in New Hampshire. He emphasized that this is mission-driven work.
- Mr. Gillett referenced testimony from Representative Drew about the 2011 moratorium request on refugee resettlement. That request was turned down for many of the same reasons being discussed today.

#### Nicole Shults, Building Community in New Hampshire

- Ms. Shults stated that she is speaking in opposition to the bill.
- She stated that welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution is essential to our identity as Americans.
- Refugees come to the United States through a rigorous legal process. When they arrive, they work hard and contribute to become part of the fabric of our communities.
- This program is a good fiscal investment. A 2005-2019 report found that, including refugees, asylees, and their families, the net-fiscal benefit to the federal government was an estimated \$31.5 billion and \$92.3 billion to state and local governments.
- This program uses federal dollars to help refugees reach economic self-sufficiency within their first 5 years in the United States. By participating in this program, New Hampshire is able to invest in its workforce at no cost to New Hampshire taxpayers.
- This program is critical to the workforce and economy. Ms. Shults emphasized that New Hampshire is an aging state and relies on migration to build the workforce. Immigrants comprise about 7% of both the workforce and working-age population, meaning they are participating in the workforce and paying taxes. Ms. Shults emphasized that foreign-born workers are critical to certain industries.
- This program retains local control over refugee resettlement. If New Hampshire were to withdraw from this program, the federal government will continue resettlement through the Wilson-Fish Alternative Program. This results in reduced state oversight and coordination, limited state ability to align services with workforce and community needs, more opportunity for federal overreach, and potentially makes integration less efficient and more fragmented.
- Senator Prentiss inquired about the Wilson-Fish Alternative Program.
- Ms. Shults explained that there are still opportunities for the federal government to resettle refugees bypassing state office through this program.

#### Richard Minard

- Mr. Minard referenced Representative Drew's testimony on Manchester deciding they want no more refugees in 2006 and confirmed it was true.

However, in 2019 the Board of Aldermen and Mayor signed a letter to President Trump asking to continue the program in Manchester. He explained that they did so because the program makes sense in both humanitarian and economic terms.

- Mr. Minard emphasized the importance of the workforce and the variety of positions that could be filled by these individuals.
- Mr. Minard referenced his time with Building Community in New Hampshire and said last year he worked with 400 people eligible for this assistance, 79% of whom were between the ages of 18 and 60 years old. He emphasized that new Americans are young and ready to work.

#### Clement Kigugu, Overcomers Refugee Services

- Mr. Kigugu stated that he is speaking in opposition to the bill.
- He shared a personal story about his immigration to the United States as an asylum seeker. Today he is a U.S. citizen and community leader.
- When Mr. Kigugu first learned about this bill, he was concerned about both the proposal and the tone and misinformation surrounding it. He emphasized that this is about people, not just policy.
- Mr. Kigugu emphasized that refugees are not looking for handouts, but rather for a chance to rebuild their lives and belong in the community.
- Senator Avaré noted that there is a lot of persecution happening throughout the world and confirmed that this program is a means for people to escape and seek asylum. Mr. Kigugu confirmed.
- Senator Avaré recalled the Rwandan Genocide and a family that sought asylum during that time fleeing persecution. He noted that when we speak of persecution it can be similar situations to this, and Mr. Kigugu confirmed.

#### Dylan Hoey

- Mr. Hoey emphasized how intensive the vetting process is for refugees.
- To undergo resettlement, an applicant must receive a referral from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a third-party accredited organization, or an official at the U.S. embassy.
- Applicants then must be screened against the most robust biographic databases in the world. They also must undergo biometric checks with the Department of Homeland Security, complete an in-person interview with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, a social media review, and a medical screening with a panel physician. Applicants from certain countries must also receive a letter issued under the authority of the Chief of Mission, oftentimes the ambassador in the country, attesting to their employment with the U.S. government.

- Mr. Hoey explained that the individuals from the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security are national security professionals who are well trained and specifically hired for their capability to do this work.
- Mr. Hoey stated that the refugees who undergo this process should be welcomed, admired, and supported.

Patrick Binder, New Hampshire First

- Mr. Binder cited Article 3 of the New Hampshire Constitution, saying that if there is to be taxation, it must come in kind with the protection of natural rights. He stated that it is unconstitutional to take from American taxpayers for the emolument of foreign nationals.
- Mr. Binder said this bill represents a civil step towards avoiding a constitutional crisis. He emphasized the economic and emotional strain on youth when the government taxes them and spends it on replacing them.
- Mr. Binder explained that this is essentially a clean-up bill at the federal level, as the program has been paused in anticipation of potentially being shut down.
- Mr. Binder explained that studies have found that refugees do not assimilate, citing a UNH study that found many refugees lie to get here and return to their home country. He emphasized that issues and conflicts from other countries are being brought here.