

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 1, 2026

Time Opened: 11:54 a.m.

Time Closed: 12:29 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.

Sponsors:

Rep. Corcoran

Rep. Alexander Jr.

Rep. Belcher

Rep. Berry

Rep. Drew

Rep. Erf

Rep. McFarlane

Rep. Noble

Rep. Osborne

Rep. Spillane

Sen. Ward

Who supports the bill: 27 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: 723 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 Matt Drew, Hillsborough – District 19

- Representative Drew stated that he is introducing the bill on behalf of the prime sponsor.
- HB 1706 repeals the New Hampshire refugee resettlement program. It ends the Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Office of Refugee

Resettlement and bars DHHS from accepting or spending any money on refugee resettlement.

- Representative Drew feels his city has borne the brunt of refugee resettlement for more than 25 years. In 2006, the City of Manchester published a report that outlined the stress this program puts on the city, especially on the city's finances.
- The cost for translation services, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, job placement, cultural conflict resolution, crime issues and medical problems is large.
- Representative Drew explained that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have refused to work with the city, preferring to simply deliver the refugees and let the city deal with the fall out. The program actually caused the death of one refugee because the housing provided had exposed lead paint and the refugees did not understand the risk.
- In 2011, the city asked one of the NGOs, The International Institute of New England (IINE), for a moratorium on bringing in new refugees. In response, the NGO lowered the incoming refugees for that year from 300 to 200. The NGO stated in a New York Times article that they had no idea the strain it was putting on the city.
- They settled 844 people in Manchester over a 3-year period compared to 944 in Boston. Boston is a metro area six times the population of Manchester.
- There are now nine major refugee NGOs, federally funded with nearly a billion dollars, tasked by the State Department with collecting refugees and facilitating their travel into the United States.
- Two of the NGOs, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) and Church World Service (CWS) are focused in New Hampshire. They hand the refugees off to local organizations, such as Overcomers Refugee Services.
- This federal program has become a business model. While essentially non-profit, the officers and higher level staff pull in mid-six figure salaries. The CEOs of Ascentria makes \$400,000 a year, IINE makes \$300,000, and USCRI makes \$400,000 a year.
- Most refugees are looking to make a better life for themselves. The problem is that we are paying to import refugees while we are having a housing crisis, a brain-drain crisis, and a health care crisis. The refugees put a strain on the housing supply, pressure on the states medical services, and pressure on our schools, which raises property taxes.
- Representative Drew understands that we cannot stop the federal program, but he believes we can stop helping them drain resources. States that do not participate in an active state refugee resettlement program get fewer refugees.

- Representative Drew believes we are, in effect, paying taxes to raise our own taxes and create additional problems.
- Senator Long asked if he mentioned a 2026 study that Manchester published.
- Representative Drew clarified that the study was in 2006 and he sent a PDF with links to the studies.
- Senator Prentiss asked why would we not focus on reforms and guardrails for the NGOs, instead of repealing a whole program and office that may serve the whole state
- Representative Drew answered that if we look at how the money is allocated for the NGOs, we would see that the funds get dispersed between all that apply. He does not think putting guardrails on them will work because the refugees are coming and the agencies need to place them somewhere. Unless they can fend it off at the state level, the NGOs will show up with the refugees and we cannot stop them.
- Senator Prentiss clarified that this is not necessarily a proposal for reform around the NGOs, but more of a statement on how that money is spent. She asked if he had a proposal on how the refugees could be managed without this program.
- Representative Drew replied that he does not have a proposal. He added that without the state program, all evidence indicates that the flow of refugees will mostly cease. There are other states that do not have these programs, and they do not receive refugees. The state office is key to facilitating the flow and shutting down that office will shut down the flow.
- Senator Prentiss commented that some of her reading states the contrary, that refugees are still going to come. They might not come in the numbers that are coming in now, but they will still come. She asked if he had any response to the recent op-ed about workforce shortages and opportunities for refugees to have jobs and supporting our economic system.
- Representative Drew answered that the state also has a crisis with young granite staters leaving the state. He believes that at the same time we are trying to retain those young granite staters, we are importing people who are competing with them for housing and jobs.
- Senator Prentiss asked if it is his position that refugees are displacing young granite staters in the housing market and the workforce.
- Representative Drew answered that competing would be a more accurate description.
- Senator Rochefort asked if Representative Drew saw the New Hampshire Journal article about an influx of about 145,000 people from Massachusetts moving to New Hampshire. Representative Drew replied that he did.

- Senator Rochefort commented that he thinks that would cause a greater competition for housing than refugees.
- Representative Drew commented that he agrees, but the difference is that we are paying for the refugees here. The people moving in from Massachusetts are here because they have been attracted by the state's low taxes and low spending.
- Senator Prentiss commented that this is a federally funded program administered by the state and asked where we are paying for this.
- Representative Drew replied that it is federally funded and everyone is a federal taxpayer.

Representative Timothy Horrigan, Strafford – District 10

- Representative Horrigan has seen one of the studies mentioned, but he still thinks that this bill is a bad idea.
- He believes we are all immigrants and that refugees have a right to come in to New Hampshire.

Representative Trinidad Tellez, Hillsborough – District 40

- The state refugee resettlement program was moved to DHHS, so that it would be run more efficiently.
- This program is 100% federally funded. The funding is dispersed to local organizations to serve people that are already here.
- Representative Tellez does not believe that this bill will have an effect on resettlement because resettlement happens through a different process.
- The federal government interacts directly with the local agencies to resettle the refugees.
- The concern with this bill is that by dismantling the program, it would be administered by an agency outside of state government and they would lose the efficiencies that DHHS has created around the program.
- Refugees come here because they have been displaced by war or terrible conditions that forced them to leave their home. It is a humanitarian effort to resettle them all over the world, including the United States. They are given loans for the cost of coming to the United States which they pay back.
- A 2024 U.S. DHHS report found that there is an overwhelmingly positive fiscal impact stemming from the presence of refugees and asylum seekers. They have a net positive economic contribution.
- Senator Long asked if the people in the refugee resettlement program are people who have been vetted to come here. Representative Tellez replied that is correct.

Representative Tim Hartnett, Hillsborough – District 41

- Representative Hartnett does not know of any evidence that shows getting rid of this program will slow down the passage of refugees into the state.
- Refugees are a small piece of the larger immigration debate being held nationally.
- Refugees are people who are trying to flee political persecution, oppression, and natural disasters.
- Representative Hartnett is against this bill because he thinks it is un-American and not the New Hampshire way.
- There is no cost to New Hampshire in keeping things the way they are.

Ann Landry, Reuben Hampton, & John Williams, Esq., Department of Health and Human Services

- The state has administered this program for decades in conjunction with local and state government partners.
- They have ensured that refugees, all of whom are vetted extensively, are able to integrate successfully and achieve economic independence.
- This bill would diminish the effectiveness and oversight of the program without changing the number of refugees who arrive in the state.
- Removing this program would put a significant amount of federal funding at risk. It would hamper what has been collaboration between intergovernmental and local organizations.
- If the state relinquishes control of the program, the Office of Refugee Resettlement would select an NGO to manage the program in their stead.
- There would be a disruption of services and a strain on local municipalities.
- Of the 14 states where an NGO runs the program, 9 of them have asked the state to retake control so they can receive those funds.
- Associate Commissioner Landry stated that 100% of this is a federally funded, bipartisan program.
- It is a longstanding program in New Hampshire which has helped to integrate services for refugees.
- If this bill passes, they will have the same amount of refugees and \$1 million less to support them.
- Mr. Williams stated that it is important to note that the current administration is the one that is designating the loss of those funds.
- They want to encourage state control for purposes of auditing and oversight to make sure the federal dollars that are being spent are directed exactly for the program.
- Senator Rochefort asked if it was fair to say that the federal administration would prefer to have the system that we have in place today.
- Mr. Williams replied that is a fair statement. He added that they back it up with a reduction in approximately \$1.1 million in federal funding.

- Senator Avard asked if they could talk more about the NGO salaries and if that is federal money. He added that there has been a lot of fraud in the Midwest with Somali refugees and asked if they can confirm that is not happening here in New Hampshire.
- Mr. Williams replied that the bill has a fiscal note; with total funds, they are looking at \$4.5 million. They have the leverage of working with the NGOs and working with their internal resources to maximize the services they use to help those seeking citizenship in the United States. They take fraud prevention very seriously and have a robust program with fraud investigators.
- Associate Commissioner Landry commented that she oversees the Division of Quality and Integrity. They talk regularly about how to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. She added that they are very proactive about prevention.
- Mr. Reuben commented that they review all program invoices and contracts, as the federal program has very specific terms of compliance that they have to report back.
- Senator Prentiss asked what will happen if this program is eliminated.
- Associate Commissioner Landry replied that if they remove this program from being administered by state government, it will create more stress on local communities and will increase strain on cities that have more people with more services.

The public hearing for HB 1706-FN was recessed to April 2nd, 2026, at 2:30 P.M.