



State of New Hampshire

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCORD

February 24th, 2026

To: Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee

Dear Chairman MacDonald,

In re. HB1706, an act repealing the refugee resettlement program in the Department of Health and Human Services and prohibiting expenditure of state funds on refugee resettlement

Note: This testimony represents my views and, most importantly, the views and interests of the constituents I serve in the towns of Alexandria, Bridgewater, Bristol, Canaan, Dorchester, Enfield, Grafton, Groton, Hebron and Orange. My testimony is not made on behalf of any private employer nor should it be construed to represent the views of any of my employers.

For decades, refugee protection rested on a simple, sober idea: people fleeing persecution should reach safety quickly in the nearest secure country, and, when conditions allow, return home. That framework was practical and limited: it treated asylum as emergency protection, not as a permanent relocation program.

We have drifted far from that. Today, refugee policy too often operates as a long-term resettlement pipeline into the wealthiest western countries, including the United States. This shift has been driven by incentives and institutional momentum: when systems are funded, staffed, and evaluated based on “clients served”, the pressure is always to expand categories, loosen boundaries, and resist enforcement. Compassion becomes a bureaucracy, and bureaucracy always grows.

First Safe Country is Common Sense

A first safe country approach does three essential things:

- it keeps asylum a protection tool rather than a migration channel;
- it reduces incentives for dangerous long-distance movement and smuggling; and
- it prevents asylum-shopping based on welfare benefits, labor markets, or political leverage.

If a person has escaped persecution and reached a safe neighboring country, the core humanitarian obligation has been met: they are safe. The purpose of refugee protection is to stop imminent harm, not to guarantee placement in the most desirable jurisdiction on earth.

Moral Hazard and the Incentive Problem

An ecosystem of contractors, nonprofits, and advocacy organizations now depends on sustained resettlement flows. Federal grants support administration and services. Legal and policy groups push to widen eligibility and narrow enforcement. And local communities inherit the long-term costs of housing pressure, school impacts, healthcare demand, and service coordination.

That is moral hazard in plain terms: those who profit from intake decisions are not the ones who pay the bill — and it is New Hampshire towns and taxpayers who must then pay the long-term bill.

The Refugee Standard Has Been Blurred

Under federal law, “refugee” is a narrow category tied to a well-founded fear of persecution on specific grounds. In practice, modern systems often struggle to maintain that narrowness at scale. Standards soften, documentation is inconsistent, and cases can take years to resolve. When adjudication drags out or screening is weak, the result is predictable: the distinction between refugee protection and general immigration blurs, public trust erodes, and legitimate refugees are harmed by the backlash.

Safe Third Country Agreements Matter

Safe third country rules exist for a reason: to prevent forum-shopping and to keep humanitarian protection from becoming an open-ended bypass around lawful immigration. Yet, enforcement is routinely contested, delayed, or undercut.

If someone passes through multiple safe countries to reach the United States, it is difficult to maintain that the issue is immediate safety rather than preferred destination. A functioning system requires: first safe country expectations, returns to safe transit jurisdictions where agreements exist, and a disciplined application of the statutory refugee definition.

Refugee Protection is Not Legal Immigration

Legal immigration is a sovereign policy choice. It is structured, numerically controlled, vetted in advance, and aligned with a nation's security interests and its capacity to integrate newcomers. Refugee protection is different: it is a narrow, emergency doctrine meant to prevent return to persecution.

When refugee status becomes a de facto alternative immigration system, untethered from first safe country principles and maintained through weak enforcement, the rule of law collapses and public support for both asylum and legal immigration is damaged.

A Concrete Example: HR25

HR25 brought this issue into sharp focus. In committee, we heard advocacy for the State of New Hampshire to help facilitate "safe home visits" for the thousands of individuals who are here under refugee status on the claim that returning to their homeland would subject them to persecution. That is a fundamental contradiction. Refugee protection is premised on credible, ongoing fear. It cannot coherently mean "unsafe to return – except for vacations".

Yet HR25 passed the House despite opposition from most Republicans. That vote illustrates how far the concept of refugee protection has drifted from its original purpose. If conditions in the country of origin materially improve, then repatriation, and not taxpayer-subsidized dual presence, should at least be part of the discussion. A refugee system that permits indefinite domicile here while advocating for normal travel ties back to the alleged place of persecution undermines public trust and erodes the integrity of refugee status itself.

Why HB1706 Matters

HB1706 is straightforward. It ends New Hampshire's participation in refugee resettlement administration.

This is not a statement about individual worth. It is a statement about governance. New Hampshire should not be an administrative arm for USRAP or related resettlement programs. If the federal government wishes to pursue these policies, it may do so without commandeering state agencies and without shifting long-term social service pressures onto local communities that never consented to the program.

The fiscal note underscores the point: roughly \$4.5 million per year in federal funds currently flow through DHHS for this purpose. Federal dollars are not free. They come with administrative obligations and downstream impacts that show up in our local budgets — in our schools, housing, healthcare, and municipal services. HB1706 restores accountability and boundaries: New Hampshire will not administer, subsidize, or indirectly support refugee resettlement through state government.

That is sound federalism, fiscal prudence, and respect for the limited role of state government.

HB1706 ought to pass.

Yours sincerely,

Rep. Donald McFarlane
Grafton 18