

Pro-Refugee Legislation in the 114th Congress

[The Protecting Religious Minorities Persecuted by ISIS Act of 2015 \(H.R. 1568\)](#)

Introduced by Representative Vargas (D-CA), this bill would make the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) more accessible to individuals in or from Iraq and Syria, including individuals facing persecution by ISIS based on gender, religion or ethnicity, by allowing them direct access to the refugee admissions process. The legislation also:

- Allows refugees to apply to USRAP directly for Priority 2 processing
- Requires adjudicators to maintain a record of evidence considered and provide a written decision for any denial of admissions
- Allows refugees to have legal representation at interviews
- Creates an administrative appeal mechanism
- Add additional staff and processing entities in the region
- Streamline existing systems for conducting background and security checks
- Require reports on using video conferencing for refugee interviews in cases where in-person interviews are not available

This legislation is bipartisan and has the support of 12 Republicans and 17 Democrats (July 31, 2015).

[The Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act \(H.R. 2798\)](#)

Reintroduced by Representative Ellison (D-MN), this bill would provide increased protections and services to all categories of refugees, would admit refugees as legal permanent residents (currently they must wait a year to apply) and would remove the expiration of supplemental security income benefits for elderly and vulnerable refugees. This legislation also:

- Reviews refugee processing with the goal of streamlining processing while maintaining thorough security checks
- Establishes pre-arrival English language classes and work orientation programs
- Updates placement grants for inflation and to meet initial needs
- Funds national resettlement agencies at a sufficient level
- Opines that the President should appoint a White House Coordinator on Refugee Protection
- Provides funding for case management services and expands monetary support for refugees
- Requires voluntary agencies be funded at the start of the year
- Establishes refugee integration grants to integrate refugees into US civic life
- Expands the matching grant program and adjusts amount based on inflation and cost of living
- Establishes a Domestic Emergency Refugee Resettlement Fund to meet unanticipated resettlement needs

- Grants refugee benefits and foster care to special immigrant juveniles (SIJS) and unaccompanied children granted U-visas.

This bill has the support of 24 Democrats. (July 31, 2015)

[Domestic Resettlement Reform and Modernization Act of 2015 \(S.1615\)](#)

Introduced by Senators Stabenow (D-MI), King (I-ME) and Peters (D-MI), this bill mandates an assessment of the well-being of refugees resettled to the United States and revises federal funding to states and local resettlement organizations to ensure that communities and refugees receive appropriate levels of assistance. The bill also expands data collection and reporting regarding refugees' mental health, medical needs, and other needs.

Representative Pascrell (D-NJ) introduced an identical [companion bill](#) (H.R. 2839) in the House of Representatives. This legislation:

- Orders a GAO study of the effectiveness of the ORR's domestic refugee resettlement programs including how self-sufficiency is defined, how money is spent and the role of community-based programs
- Reports on the needs of secondary migrants and their impact on states
- Extends assistance to secondary migrants
- Gathers data on mental and physical health, housing needs, employment and self-sufficiency of refugees
- Instructs the Department of State to collect best practices of national resettlement agencies and guide agencies

This bill has no additional cosponsors in either the Senate or House of Representatives. (July 31, 2015).