

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2024

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Chair
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Katie Britt
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Senate Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chair Murphy and Ranking Member Britt:

As you develop the Fiscal Year 2025 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill, we urge you to expand federal assistance to destination states and localities helping families and individuals attain self-sufficiency as they go through the immigration process. In particular, we recommend complementing the existing Shelter and Services Program (SSP) with support for a Destination Reception Fund (DRF) that would fund medium-term services for new arrivals to help reduce the use of expensive emergency shelters.

Through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) SSP fund, Congress has appropriated vital emergency funding to support a humane and orderly response to the families and individuals released from DHS custody. SSP provides federal funds to state, local, and tribal governments, as well as nonprofits to cover the costs of emergency shelter, food, acute medical care, and other essential services for new arrivals. But SSP funding has been stretched thin, with communities across the United States facing expenses that far exceed the amount of federal assistance they receive.

Furthermore, Congress has not yet provided assistance to states and localities implementing medium-term reception programs that promote the self-sufficiency of newcomers and help reduce use of expensive emergency shelters. Many communities are already working to establish local reception funds¹ and implement programs to help families and individuals secure housing, rental assistance, employment authorization, and job opportunities, so that they can exit the shelter system and support themselves.²

¹ See, e.g., HB24-1280 (Colorado), Welcome, Reception, & Integration Grant Program, <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/hb24-1280>; SB3296 (Illinois), Support Immigrant Labor Fund, <https://ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocNum=3296&GAID=17&DocTypeID=SB&LegId=152668&SessionID=112&GA=103>; A08194 (New York), Temporary Relocation Assistance for Asylum Seekers Fund, https://nyassembly.gov/leg/?default_fld=&leg_video=&bn=A08194&term=2023&Summary=Y.

² See, e.g., Carla Rojo, “Mass. pilot program aims to help migrants find housing,” NBC Boston (Feb. 12, 2024), <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/mass-pilot-program-aims-to-help-migrants-find-housing/3277733/>; Lizzie Kane & Laura Rodríguez Presa “Migrants are leaving Chicago shelters with the help of rental assistance,” Chicago Tribune, (July 23, 2023), https://www.gmtoday.com/news/illinois/migrants-are-leaving-chicago-shelters-with-the-help-of-rental-assistance/article_359b89ac-27d7-11ee-b623-c3fdf74f4dfd.html; Sean Stackhouse, “Avesta Housing works to develop 100 housing units for asylum seekers,” News Center Maine (Aug. 22, 2022), <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/local/maine-immigration/avesta-housing-works-to-develop-100-housing-units-for-asylum-seekers-south-portland-maine/97-03988a92-4184-468e-9eff-084281ffe185>; Office of Global Michigan, “Newcomer Rental Subsidy,” <https://www.michigan.gov/ogm/services/newcomer-rental-subsidy>; “South King County \$1M Asylum-Seeker Support RFP,” <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive/governance-leadership/performance-strategy-budget/grants-procurements/skc-1m-asylum-seeker-support-rfp>.

Therefore, we recommend establishment of a DRF, either as a new fund or an expansion of an existing fund, to meet the growing needs of local communities hosting new arrivals. DRF grants would support states and localities assisting families and individuals by supplementing local efforts to provide sustainable housing support; health and interpretation services; workforce development programs; legal assistance; service navigation; and other relevant state or local programs.

By helping new arrivals achieve stability in the United States, Congress would support not only migrant families themselves but also the local economies across the country that benefit from their contributions. A recent study by the Department of Health and Human Services confirms that, between 2005 and 2019, resettled refugees and asylees had a combined net positive fiscal impact of \$124 billion at the federal, state and local levels—generating more in government revenues than they use in services.³ Analysis of the economic impacts of newly arrived immigrants also shows that they contribute to economic output, add to local spending power, and increase state and local tax revenue.⁴ The DRF could unlock new opportunities and additional benefits for newcomers to help stimulate economic activity in their communities.

We recommend an allocation of \$500,000,000 for FEMA to administer a DRF grant program. The program could build on the precedent of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program-Humanitarian fund (the predecessor to SSP that existed from 2019 through 2023) and the Immigration Emergency Fund, which has been authorized by Congress since 1990 to support reception of asylum seekers. It should be administered in a way that recognizes the integral role states and localities play in assessing local needs and that experienced community-based non-profits play in providing human and social services. It could also be administered in coordination with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to leverage ORR's expertise providing medium-term essential services to refugees.

In addition, we recommend an allocation of \$20,000,000 to the DHS Secretary for an Office of Reception Coordination that would share timely information about released populations with receiving states and localities to better plan responses and that would help local government and nongovernmental service providers access available federal resources.

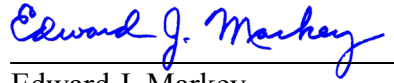
This additional funding would provide for a continuum of orderly reception that effectively supports receiving communities and provides a more dignified welcome to families and individuals seeking safety in our country.

Thank you for your consideration.

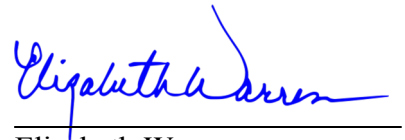
³ Robin Ghertner, Suzanne Macartney, and Meredith Dost, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The Fiscal Impact of Refugees and Asylees at the Federal, State, and Local Levels from 2005-2019," (Feb. 2024), p. 4, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/28fe4e756499bdab08b4e6cb3b952e22/aspe-report-refugee-fiscal-impact.pdf>.

⁴ Immigration Research Initiative, "Economic Projections for Asylum Seekers and New Immigrants: U.S. and State-Level Data," (Feb. 7, 2024), <https://immresearch.org/publications/economic-projections-for-asylum-seekers-and-new-immigrants-u-s-and-50-states/>.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator