



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH *All of God's Creation*

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, March 23, 2025

Let's Not Forget Our North Star as Catholics

Scripture, history, and tradition paints a clear picture of our duties and responsibilities to generously welcome refugees fleeing oppression and violence in their native lands. Starting in the Old Testament (Exodus 23:9) through the New Testament (Matthew 25:35) and into the 21st Century (Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000), **our North Star as Catholics remains treating refugees and immigrants with dignity and compassion.** It is no wonder that the Catholic Church, until February 2025, administered the nation's largest private refugee resettlement program. ([ref](#))

However, **in recent weeks, federal policymakers abruptly suspended millions of dollars of federal funding to Catholic organizations that have provided refugee resettlement and support services for many years.** ([ref](#)) The funding was suspended by an executive order halting the U.S. Refugee Assistance Program ("USRAP").

USRAP was established by Congress in 1980 to formalize the process by which refugees vetted and approved by the U.S. government are legally resettled in the U.S. The program is a multi-agency effort that includes federal entities, the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations such as the Catholic Church. The United States Council of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services was one of 10 national resettlement agencies working with USRAP. ([ref](#))

In response to the executive order, **the United States Council of Catholic Bishops ("USCCB") sued the United States Department of State to restore funding already committed by law and to reimburse Catholic organizations over \$13 million for services already rendered** for refugee resettlement and support services, pursuant to contracts with the federal government. ([ref](#))

USCCB noted "[t]he lawsuit . . . challenges the federal government's suspension of funding for the refugee assistance programs we have run for decades. Throughout this long-time partnership with the U.S. government, **the USCCB has helped nearly a million individuals find safety and build their lives in the United States.** Refugees are individuals who have undergone special screening and vetting procedures by the U.S. government and are fleeing hardship and persecution in their home countries to resettle in the United States. We are urging the government to uphold its legal and moral obligations to refugees and to restore the necessary funding to ensure that faith-based and community organizations can continue this vital work that reflects our nation's values of compassion, justice, and hospitality." ([ref](#))

The impact of the federal funding suspension was immediate, as **the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services Group was forced to lay off more than half its staff,** with additional cuts expected in local Catholic Charities offices. ([ref](#))

The lawsuit argues that the suspension of funding is "a textbook arbitrary-and-capricious agency action" that "violates multiple statutes" and "undermines the Constitution's separation of powers." ([ref](#))

In mid-March, the judge hearing the case, ordered both parties to participate in mediation and continue forward with the case ([ref](#)). Stay tuned for developments in this important effort to restore support for our refugee brothers and sisters.

Thanks to Brian Cullin who contributed this column. Comments on this column may be directed to the Social Justice Committee at socialjustice@holycrossphl.org. [Click here for column archive.](#)