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By ESEC External at 2:29 pm, Jun 15, 2021

June 4, 2021

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The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Office of the Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

I write to propose a new social services program to assist asylum seekers. As more asylum seekers are allowed to enter the country, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will not only want to track the location of asylum seekers, but also gauge community reaction to the entry of individuals while the pandemic, although hopefully in its final days, continues to affect the country and the world.

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) has a nationwide network that is prepared to provide social services to asylum seekers, conduct community outreach and education, and work with DHS to ensure asylum seekers attend their asylum hearings. USCRI would bring to bear the same skills, networks, and resources it has used to resettle refugees in its public-private partnership with the Department of State since 1977.

The attached paper briefly describes the program, which would provide social services to asylum seekers in the communities in which they wish to settle, work in conjunction with current and evolving DHS programs tracking and processing asylum seekers, and bolster community understanding of asylum seekers and the immigration process.

I hope that you will review the attached paper and consider this program for implementation. If you have any questions, you or your staff can reach me at [enegash@uscrdc.org](mailto:enegash@uscrdc.org) or 703-310-1130.

Sincerely,

Eskinder Negash  
President and CEO

## The CLEAR Program

### Connecting Legally Entering Asylum Seekers to Resources

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The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) has a network of 34 partner agencies across the country. The network has been providing resettlement services nationwide to refugees for over 40 years. USCRI proposes, working in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), to use its network of agencies to provide social services to asylum seekers, encourage them to stay connected to the immigration system throughout their asylum cases, and to bolster community support for new asylees.

### The Need

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The number of migrants, many seeking asylum, apprehended at the southern border in April was over 170,000 for the second straight month. They continue to be turned back to Mexico under Title 42, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention pandemic health authority. However, some are now being allowed through based on humanitarian need. USCRI's Tijuana and San Diego offices have been working together to assist some of these asylum seekers to come into the United States to legally present their cases.

Once in the United States, these asylum seekers disperse throughout the country with no access to social services and sometimes limited motivation to report to DHS and follow through with their immigration case. The numbers and the need will continue to grow. As numbers grow, communities may become hesitant to welcome newcomers.

### The Goal

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The CLEAR program would satisfy three goals. First, it would connect asylum seekers to social services, including legal immigration services, in the many communities across the United States where they wish to settle, ensuring their safety and security as they begin their time in the United States. Second, asylum seekers would not need to be detained, thus saving much-needed funding for immigration functions. In addition, the CLEAR program could be used in conjunction with less invasive alternatives to detentions, such as the SmartLINK technology. It would encourage asylum seekers to maintain their appointments with ICE and go through the legal immigration process without the ankle monitoring devices, bringing more order to the immigration process and fewer disruptions in local communities. Third, with the USCRI network's long-term presence in communities across the United States, CLEAR could bolster community involvement and acceptance of newcomers, avoiding negative local reactions and media reports.

## The Plan

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To implement the CLEAR program, DHS would include the list of USCRI network agencies in the entry packet that asylum seekers receive. Asylum seekers would choose the agency closest to their destination in the United States, informing DHS of their choice. DHS would notify the USCRI network agency, which would prepare to offer services. When the asylum seeker arrived at their destination, the USCRI network agency would provide social services, such as assistance with finding housing, helping children to enroll in school, and referrals to immigration legal service providers. The USCRI network would work in cooperation with DHS to encourage attendance at immigration hearings. The network would also conduct community outreach to bolster community understanding and acceptance.

## Capacity of the USCRI Network

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USCRI's Reception and Placement (R&P) Program is at the heart of its work with refugees. This public-private partnership with the U.S. Department of State has provided a safe haven for those who have fled their homes in fear of persecution for almost 50 years. Since 1977, USCRI has worked across the nation and assisted over 300,000 newcomers—connecting them to services and building bridges to their communities. The USCRI current R&P Network includes 34 sites in 22 states.

USCRI staff begin their work at the airport, welcoming new clients, providing them furnished housing, and connecting them to benefits and supportive services including Social Security cards, healthcare, schools, English classes and employment opportunities. USCRI staff work closely with volunteers, social service providers, employers, and communities to help refugees start their new lives in their new communities.

USCRI and its network of partner agencies could bring to bear the same skills and resources to assist asylum seekers. Asylum seekers in more stable situations are more likely to report to DHS as required and follow through in their immigration case. The CLEAR program provides safety to the asylum seekers, more orderly immigration for the U.S. government and more understanding in local communities.

Please see the attached map of our network partners. For an interactive map, go to our website: <https://refugees.org/agencies/>



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

July 16, 2021

Eskinder Negash  
President and CEO  
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants  
2231 Crystal Drive, Suite 350  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Negash:

Thank you for your June 4, 2021 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf.

On February 2, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order 14012, *Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration Systems and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans* (E.O. 14012). Section 1 of E.O. 14012 states:

[I]t is essential to ensure that our laws and policies encourage full participation by immigrants, including refugees, in our civic life; that immigration processes and other benefits are delivered effectively and efficiently; and that the Federal Government eliminates sources of fear and other barriers that prevent immigrants from accessing government services available to them.

Section 3(a) directs the Secretary of State, Attorney General, and Secretary of Homeland Security to:

- (i) identify barriers that impede access to immigration benefits and fair, efficient adjudications of these benefits and make recommendations on how to remove these barriers, as appropriate and consistent with applicable law; and
- (ii) identify any agency actions that fail to promote access to the legal immigration system . . . and recommend steps, as appropriate and consistent with applicable law, to revise or rescind those agency actions.

In accordance with these directives, DHS is identifying and assessing mechanisms to improve access to the fair and efficient adjudication of immigration benefit requests, including asylum. DHS values the input of organizations like USCRI in conducting these assessments and appreciates your proposal entitled “The CLEAR Program.” We will certainly keep it in mind as we continue to consider agency actions to remove barriers that impede access to our asylum system and to effectively deliver this important humanitarian benefit to those who qualify.

Mr. Eskinder Negash

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Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact the USCIS Public Engagement Division at [public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tracy L. Renaud". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T".

Tracy L. Renaud  
Acting Director