



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Sean M. Ryan

## New York Legislators and Refugee Resettlement Agencies Urge President Biden To Raise Cap and Allow More Refugees To Resettle In The United States

SEAN M. RYAN April 21, 2021

| ISSUE: NYS SENATOR SEAN RYAN, IMMIGRATION COALITION, REFUGEE POLICY, NYS SENATE DISTRICT 60, PRESIDENT BIDEN



### **NEW YORK LEGISLATORS AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES URGE PRESIDENT BIDEN TO RAISE CAP AND ALLOW MORE REFUGEES TO RESETTLE IN THE UNITED STATES**

*President Biden Previously Committed To Allowing 125,000 Annual Refugee Admissions – New York Leaders Push President To Follow Through And Raise Cap To Allow 62,500 Refugees To Resettle During*

## *Second Half Of The Fiscal Year*

**ALBANY** – Yesterday, April 21, 2021, New York State Senators Sean Ryan, Tim Kennedy, Jeremy Cooney, John Mannion, Neil Breslin, Rachel May, and Samra Brouk, and New York State Assemblymembers William Magnarelli, Patricia Fahy, Jon Rivera, Marianne Buttenschon, Monica Wallace, Patrick Burke, Karen McMahon, and Sarah Clark wrote to President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., urging him to raise the 15,000 cap on refugee admissions which was set by the previous administration. The legislators were joined by several refugee resettlement agencies that receive funding from the federal government to assist newly arrived refugees find housing, employment, and additional resources during the initial 90-day resettlement period.

Earlier this year, President Biden pledged to increase the annual cap on refugee admissions to 125,000, an increase of 733% from the 15,000-refugee cap implemented by the Trump administration. The coalition of legislators and resettlement agencies noted that, while the previous administration caused serious damage to our resettlement infrastructure, the Biden administration has the tools available to get the process moving once again. The International Rescue Committee estimates there are approximately 33,000 refugees who have already been approved for resettlement and are now waiting for the Biden administration to act.

Communities across New York, especially Upstate cities like Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, and Albany, have seen their economies greatly enhanced by refugee admissions during the last two decades. The significant decrease in refugee resettlement over the last four years has negatively impacted these communities.

The coalition noted that when the previous administration made devastating cuts to refugee admissions, New York State stepped up to create a resettlement fund in the state budget to

support its resettlement agencies and offset the sharp cut in funding they received due to the prior restrictive policies. Because of this proactive action, which includes \$3 million from the recently passed state budget, New York has been able to maintain much of the service infrastructure – particularly in Upstate New York, where agencies are ready and able to accept more new arrivals.

**Senator Sean Ryan** said, “Restoring refugee admissions to the United States is, foremost, a moral imperative for a country that prides itself on a history of multiculturalism. At the same time, it will also provide important economic benefits to communities like Western New York. As New York’s leading refugee resettlement region, the Buffalo area suffered due to the previous administration’s restrictive refugee policies. Refugees contribute significantly to the vibrancy of our local community, and to the economy throughout Upstate New York. After four years of an administration that aimed divisive rhetoric at immigrants and refugees, President Biden must stand by his word and take decisive action to show the world that we are still a nation whose strength is derived from its diversity.”

**Senator Rachel May** said, “Syracuse and Central New York are better places because of the vast contributions of refugee communities. They help our cities grow, become vibrant, more diverse, and a better place to live. We are eager to welcome refugees and help them to thrive and integrate into our community and our economy. New York has invested in keeping our resettlement infrastructure working and intact and we are ready to welcome more New Americans. I urge President Biden and his administration to uphold their commitment to increasing the current cap on refugee admission which will help make New York, and our country, stronger.”

**Assemblymember William Magnarelli** said, “Refugees are an integral part of our upstate communities. We share in the commitment to rebuild the refugee resettlement system. Our local agencies are ready to accept more arrivals. Increasing the number of accepted refugees

is not only the right thing to do but also will help strengthen our economies and our communities.”

**Assemblymember Patrick Burke** said, “The fact is irrefutable that the growth of refugee populations in neighborhoods that have seen economic and population decline has brought a net benefit to those communities. We here in Western New York understand that better than most. We are ready and able to accept refugees and I hope President Biden acts swiftly in raising the cap on new arrivals.”

**Assemblymember Monica Wallace** said, “Here in Buffalo and Western New York, we have seen firsthand how refugees and immigrants work hard, open businesses, contribute to the tax base, and help to rejuvenate struggling neighborhoods. Raising the cap on refugee settlements not only benefits the thousands of vulnerable people who are yearning for a better life, like many of our ancestors did, but also strengthens and enriches our diverse community. I urge President Biden to help refugees and support Western New York by raising the cap on refugee admissions for the remainder of 2021.”

**Eva Hassett, Executive Director, International Institute of Buffalo** said, “Refugee resettlement is a moral and economic imperative. This is especially in true in upstate NY and Great Lakes communities like Buffalo, where refugees have slowed population loss, helped retain jobs, revitalized commercial streets, and enhanced the cultural richness of our neighborhoods and region. Through the leadership of New York State, particularly State Senator Sean Ryan and Assemblymember Jon Rivera, we now have \$3 million in additional funding statewide to help refugees even after the initial federal 90-day period. Because of this, agencies in New York, like the International Institute, are even more prepared to help integrate. State funding was increased in 2021 to prepare for increased arrivals and ensure their success. At the International Institute, we are ready to receive and support more refugees now, just as we have been for the more than 40 years of the federal resettlement program. The number of

refugees looking to make new lives is at historic highs. All over the world, human and environmental tragedy continues to displace people. The US refugee admissions program that intakes and screens candidates for resettlement works. We urge the Biden administration to raise the cap on refugee admissions this year and in 2022.”

A copy of the letter appears below.

April 21, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr. President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today regarding the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and your administration’s stated commitment to rejoin the global community and become a welcoming nation for refugees once again. Your recent signing of the Emergency Presidential Determination and announcement that you would soon make a decision to raise the 15,000-refugee cap imposed by the previous administration is welcome news. We urge you to solidify your commitment by raising the refugee cap to 62,500 for the second half of the current fiscal year.

In February, you signed an executive order to rebuild and enhance federal programs that resettle refugees – infrastructure which had been gutted under the previous administration. You subsequently pledged to increase the annual cap on refugee admissions to 125,000, an increase of 733% from the 15,000-refugee cap implemented by the previous administration.

After four years of xenophobia and policies designed to shut the United States off from the rest of the world, these actions stood out as sincere commitment to rebuilding our refugee resettlement system both at home and abroad. There is still ample time to follow through on this impactful commitment to welcome more refugees to our shores.

Halfway into the current fiscal year, the United States is still operating under the refugee cap of the previous administration. We have admitted only a fraction of the maximum number of refugee admissions that your administration has committed to. While we understand that the previous administration caused serious damage to our resettlement infrastructure which will take time to rebuild, your administration has the tools available to get the process moving once again.

In New York, we are looking forward to welcoming more refugees. When the previous administration made devastating cuts to refugee admissions, our state stepped up to create a resettlement fund in the state budget to support our resettlement agencies and offset the sharp cut in funding they received due to the prior restrictive policies. Because of this proactive action, New York has been able to maintain much of our service infrastructure, particularly in Upstate New York, where agencies are ready and able to accept more new arrivals. Our refugee resettlement agencies have been waiting for four years for a policy change, and they are ready to get back to the way things used to be. Communities across New York, especially Upstate cities like Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, and Albany, have seen their economies greatly enhanced by refugee admissions during the last two decades. The significant decrease in refugee resettlement over the last four years has negatively impacted these communities.

There is little strain on the United States legal and administrative systems in raising the current 15,000- refugee cap which has had a detrimental impact on the international

community. Refugees are of a separate international legal status than potential asylees and are vetted through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as opposed to potential asylees, who are vetted by United States agencies. With the current cap, there are many people who have been cleared by the UNHCR to fly to the United States who will now be forced to continue to stay in refugee camps despite having undergone a rigorous vetting process. Not only does maintaining the current cap harm these refugees who have been waiting, in many cases for years, for a chance to resettle somewhere safe, but it also harms the way the United States is perceived by our allies. The United States is a party to the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. By maintaining such a low cap, we signal to the world that we do not take our commitments under this international instrument seriously. By forcing previously vetted individuals to remain in refugee camps, the United States is functionally denying them their guaranteed rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol. Raising the cap to 62,500 will help to restore the image of the United States in the eyes of the international community and make a difference in the lives of thousands of people.

You have offered, to Americans at home and refugees abroad, the hope of a new nation which welcomes vulnerable and persecuted individuals to our shores with the promise of a better life free from violence. Now that our nation has turned the page, we must work diligently to write the next chapter in our story. Unless you follow through with your previous commitment, we will fall drastically short of the goals you have set at the expense of our values and to the detriment of our communities.

Once again, we urge your administration to move swiftly to rebuild the infrastructure to welcome more refugees to the United States and New York State by immediately raising the refugee cap to 62,500 for the remaining months of the current fiscal year. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Sean M. Ryan New York State Senator, 60th District	William B. Magnarelli New York State Assemblymember, 129th District
Timothy M. Kennedy New York State Senator, 63rd District	Patricia Fahy New York State Assemblymember, 109th District
Jeremy A. Cooney New York State Senator, 56th District	Jon Rivera New York State Assemblymember, 149th District
John W. Mannion New York State Senator, 50th District	Marianne Buttenschon New York State Assemblymember, 119th District
Neil Breslin New York State Senator, 44th District	Monica Wallace New York State Assemblymember, 143rd District
Rachel May New York State Senator, 53rd District	Patrick Burke New York State Assemblymember, 142nd District
Samra Brouk New York State Senator, 55th District	Karen McMahon New York State Assemblymember, 146th District



Sarah Clark New York State Assemblymember, 136th District	
Catholic Charities of Buffalo International Institute of Buffalo Journey's End Refugee Services Jewish Family Service of Western New York Catholic Family Center of Rochester Interfaith Works Catholic Charities of Onondaga County United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Albany The Center of Utica New York Immigration Coalition Church Avenue Merchant Block Association (CAMBA) Catholic Charities of Long Island	

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