

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Joseph B. Edlow
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, MD 20588

September 29, 2026

Re: Unnecessary, wasteful green card adjudication pause and “re-vetting” process leave resettled refugees in deadly bureaucratic trap

Dear Secretary Mullin and Director Edlow:

The undersigned 56 refugee-serving, religious, veteran, refugee-led, and other humanitarian and community-based organizations write to express deep concern over an ongoing green card processing and adjudication halt impacting resettled refugees. The processing freeze comes alongside upcoming health care eligibility changes for refugees that specifically strip eligibility from those who do not have green cards, set to go into effect in October 2026 (for Medicaid and CHIP) and January 2027 (for Medicare). **These two policies are intersecting in ways that will have deadly consequences and impose massive costs on state and local communities come October 1st.**

We call on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to immediately and fully resume processing of refugee I-485 green card applications and create a clear mechanism for members of Congress to request expedited processing for individuals with severe medical conditions. We further call on DHS and USCIS to halt unnecessary re-vetting of refugees who are already among the most vetted individuals to arrive in the United States.

1. Refugee “re-vetting” and the green card adjudication/processing freeze

Refugees resettled through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) go through extensive biometric, biographic, and interagency vetting, medical screening, in-person interviews, and a refugee status determination before being approved to resettle in the U.S. Under the law, resettlement is a permanent process that comes with a clear, direct path to apply for lawful permanent residence (a green card) and eventual U.S. citizenship. Refugees are required by U.S. law to apply for a green card one year after they resettle in the United States, and, unlike many other immigration benefits, this is a *nondiscretionary* process. That means USCIS must grant green cards to refugees who qualify and apply.

However, in March 2025, without any public announcement, USCIS [appeared](#) to almost entirely [stop processing](#) of refugee and asylee green cards. Finally, in a [November 20, 2025 memo](#), your department implemented a hold on all green card applications ([I-485s](#)) for refugees admitted between January 20, 2021 and February 20, 2025.

Since then, an effort to indiscriminately arrest and detain refugees with pending green card applications has been blocked by multiple federal courts. Today, refugee green card applications remain largely frozen as the overall backlog has ballooned to more than 275,000.¹ A tiny number (fewer than 300) have been processed thus far in 2026, and it remains unclear why these individuals have been chosen, what criteria were used to select these individuals, or whether all of these cases are all part of an ongoing attempt to “re-vet” already rigorously vetted and resettled refugees.²

2. H.R.1 and public benefits cuts targeting those without green cards

For decades, resettled refugees [have been eligible](#) for basic assistance and public benefits like SNAP, Medicaid, and CHIP immediately after arrival. These guarantees withstood even eras of social services retrenchment, as policymakers recognized the imperative of food and medical support for those who have suffered trauma, violence, and persecution as they integrate in the United States. The USRAP was designed for rapid economic self-sufficiency, and food and health care are core needs to help ensure anyone can live, work, and take care of their families.

Yet as a result of the passage of section 71109 of H.R.1 last July, refugees *who do not have green cards* will be cut off from Medicaid, Medicare, and CHIP eligibility (following similar SNAP eligibility restrictions that went into effect in October 2025).

Although refugees are eligible for Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) for a defined period after they arrive (currently eight months), there is a growing and life-threatening coverage gap while refugees wait for their green card applications to be decided. With processing delays – and now USCIS’s freeze – refugees who were resettled during both the previous and current administrations will suffer.

The ongoing green card freeze means over 149,000 refugees who are eligible to receive a green card, and who have applied through a nondiscretionary process, are stuck in limbo. Their cases aren’t moving, and they are receiving notices saying their health coverage will be terminated. Many have severe medical conditions, including:

- A refugee family in South Carolina has just received notice that their Medicaid coverage will end. Their child has severe asthma and depends on regular medication to breathe. An elderly relative suffers from diabetes and heart disease and depends on long-term care assistance to remain safely at home. Without Medicaid, that care will no longer be available.
- An expectant refugee mother in Wisconsin is due at the end of September. Her physician is currently considering whether to induce her in September to ensure she has Medicaid

¹ Including both refugee and asylee applications.

https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/data/quarterly_all_forms_fy2026_q3_v1.xlsx

² On February 12, 2026, the government filed in *U.H.A. v. Bondi* a [USCIS memo dated January 13, 2026](#) that lifts the pause on refugee green card processing for refugees who go through the Operation PARRIS “re-vetting” process. However, USCIS has approved vanishingly few refugee adjustment of status applications for individuals subjected to re-vetting. And some green cards have been approved for refugees who appear not to have been subject to re-vetting.

for the delivery. In Wisconsin, the mother is supposed to continue receiving postpartum care under [CHIPRA 214](#), but the state is not creating a smooth process for transitioning patients and unless her green card is processed, there will be a gap in coverage.

This bureaucratic trap has ensnared refugees across the country. If left unaddressed, it is a trap that will have deadly consequences. It is also certain to exact enormous costs on state and local communities already struggling with cost shifts and broad cuts to federal support. These are conditions that must be treated, and local hospitals and health care systems – in addition to food banks, churches and congregations, and local nonprofits – will take on the burden of doing so unless the administration steps in and begins processing refugee green cards again.

We promise resettled refugees permanent protection and the opportunity to rebuild their lives in safety. Providing basic support to these refugees in the first years after they arrive is an investment in our economic growth and security. Across administrations, data shows that when properly supported during the resettlement process, refugees and asylees bring [massive fiscal benefits](#).

The path forward is not complicated. More than 45 years ago, Congress decided that refugees who qualify shall receive lawful permanent residence. We therefore urge DHS and USCIS to:

- Resume full adjudication of refugee I-485 applications immediately and commit publicly to clearing the backlog.
- Establish, before October 1st, a dedicated channel through which members of Congress and legal representatives can request expedited adjudication for applicants facing termination of medical coverage.
- End the unnecessary re-vetting of refugees who have already cleared the most rigorous screening in the U.S. immigration system.

Thank you,

Global and National Organizations:

Afghan-American Foundation
African Communities Together (ACT)
African Human Rights Coalition
Alianza Americas
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Burma Advocacy Group
Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law
Church World Service
Climate Refugees
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Region
Disciples Home Missions
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Global Refuge
HIAS
Human Rights First
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
Jesuit Refugee Service USA
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Immigrant Justice Center
New American Pathways
Nooristan Foundation
Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, Church of the Brethren
Rainbow Railroad
Refugee Advocacy Lab
Refugee Congress
Refugee Council USA
Tahirih Justice Center
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
Women for Afghan Women
World Relief

State and Local Organizations:

Cache Refugee and Immigrant Connection
Coalition of Refugee Service Agencies (CRSA)
Community Refugee & Immigration Services
Community Supported film
Diversity in Health Training Institute
East Bay Sanctuary Covenant
Exodus Refugee Immigration, Inc.
Global Friends Coalition
Hearts & Homes for Refugees
Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef)
Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Service
International Institute of Los Angeles
International Institute of New England
InterReligious Task Force on Central America
JFCS East Bay
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area
Miami Valley Immigration Coalition
Oasis Legal Services
Ohio Immigrant Alliance
REACT DC
RefugeeOne
Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning
THRIVE Center for Survivors of Torture