

# OFFICE OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

An Office of the Administration for Children & Families

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## State Letter 13-02

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**TO:** State Refugee Coordinators  
State Refugee Health Coordinators  
National Voluntary Agencies  
ACF Regional Administrators  
Other Interested Parties

**FROM:** Eskinder Negash  
Director  
Office of Refugee Resettlement

**SUBJECT:** Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Regional Offices

### Background

Since 1980, when Congress created the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the mandates of ORR and consequently, the resettlement network have expanded. While ORR historically resettled a wave of refugees at a time, from a specific country, due to a specific conflict, today ORR resettles refugees from over 60 different countries of origin in a given fiscal year. ORR now also serves asylees, special immigrant visa holders from Iraq and Afghanistan, certain Amerasians, victims of trafficking, survivors of torture and unaccompanied alien children. Over the past 30 plus years however, although ORR's populations, programs and grantees have expanded, ORR's office and staff predominantly remain centralized in Washington, DC.

Through sections 412(a)(2)(A) & (B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, Congress showed its intent of having ORR regularly consult with state and local governments and nonprofit voluntary agencies concerning the sponsorship process, strategies for placement, and policies for refugee resettlement. Additionally, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in its most recent report "Greater Consultation with Community Stakeholders Could Strengthen Program" echoed the sentiment of Congress by emphasizing the importance of outreach and engagement at the local level, and specifically recommending that the Department of Health and Human Services (through ORR) collect and disseminate best practices related to refugee placement and engagement with community stakeholders. Moreover in **State Letter #10-09** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20191114142955/https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/state-letter-10-09>), ORR named outreach as one of the six guiding principles to effective resettlement, specifically outreach to various organizations and stakeholders, to identify opportunities for collaboration in the best interests of refugees.

ORR is located within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). ACF operates ten regional offices to oversee the administration of ACF programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Child Care, and Head Start, in a given jurisdiction. ORR is one of only several remaining offices within ACF that does not have a regional presence to oversee the administration of one of its main programs. In 2006, ORR's Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) program began operations with a field presence. Today the UAC program has 23 Federal Field Specialists in six states across the country where UAC shelters and programs are concentrated. In terms of refugee programs, over the past few years, ORR has endeavored to increase consultation and engagement with regional stakeholders, by promoting collaboration between ACF Regional Administrators and the resettlement network, and by introducing the resettlement network to ACF regional programs.

Today, the refugee resettlement program faces new opportunities and challenges some of which include: accessing and maximizing benefits for refugees under the Affordable Care Act and operating under a tightened fiscal environment. In order for refugees to succeed, it is vital to strengthen the resettlement program; to have strong advocates at the federal, state and local levels educate mainstream social service agencies and governments about ORR populations, and convene meetings to promote linkages with mainstream stakeholders.

### ORR Regional Offices

After thoughtful consideration, ORR has decided to establish regional offices. ORR regional offices will be physically located within ACF regional offices. With a regional presence, ORR can partner with State Refugee Coordinators, State Refugee Health Coordinators and Ethnic Community Based Organizations to advocate for refugees; specifically ORR can work to educate stakeholders, promote collaboration, gain knowledge to inform policy and advocate for services in the best interests of refugees.

ORR will open up to five regional offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, and San Francisco (and potentially additional regional locations). ORR staff will serve as regional representatives and will work with most states within that ACF region. The ORR regional representatives will report to the Division of Refugee Assistance (DRA) within ORR.

Please direct any questions on this State Letter to Mitiku Ashebir, Division Director of DRA at **mitiku.ashebir@acf.hhs.gov** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20191114142955/mailto:mitiku.ashebir@acf.hhs.gov>) or Ken Tota, ORR Deputy Director at **kenneth.tota@acf.hhs.gov** (<https://web.archive.org/web/20191114142955/mailto:kenneth.tota@acf.hhs.gov>).

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Last Reviewed: June 21, 2019