

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6245

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As of January 25, 2024

**Title:** An act relating to assistance for refugees and immigrants.

**Brief Description:** Assisting refugees and immigrants.

**Sponsors:** Senators Hasegawa, Nguyen, Nobles, Saldaña, Stanford, Trudeau, Valdez and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Human Services: 1/25/24.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Codifies the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance within the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).
- Designates DSHS as the single state agency responsible for the development, review, and administration of the Washington State plan for refugee settlement.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

**Staff:** Alison Mendiola (786-7488)

**Background:** The Office of Refugee Resettlement provides benefits and services to assist the resettlement and local integration of specific eligible populations, and in most cases, spouses and unmarried children under 21 of those holding such statuses.

The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provides services through local government, community and technical colleges, refugee resettlement agencies, ethnic community based organizations, and other service provider agencies. Services are available only to individuals and families that

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qualify for federal Refugee Resettlement Services.

Refugee Cash and Medical Assistance provides up to 12 months of cash assistance for newly arrived refugees and eligible humanitarian immigrants who are single or married adults and ineligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Provides up to 12 months of medical assistance for newly arrived refugees and eligible humanitarian immigrants who are ineligible for Modified Adjusted Gross Income Medicaid or Classic Medicaid.

**Summary of Bill:** The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance is codified within DSHS. DSHS is to coordinate state, federal, and local efforts to support the economic and social integration of immigrants and refugees arriving and resettling in Washington.

DSHS is designated as the single state agency responsible for the development, review, and administration of the Washington State plan for refugee settlement. DSHS is to submit the state plan to and seek approval from the federal Office of Refugee Settlement within the federal Department of Health and Human Services.

DSHS shall provide refugee cash assistance, refugee medical assistance, and refugee support services in accordance with the federal act and state plan. The refugee support services may include employment services, English language instruction, case management, and other services or assistance consistent with the federal act.

DSHS may administer services to immigrants for who are ineligible for federal services. DSHS may contract with external entities, including community-based organizations, to provide services.

Immigrant means a person who has arrived in the United States and the state of Washington from another country seeking residence who is not a naturalized citizen.

Refugee means a person admitted into the United States under Section 207 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and others who are ineligible for federal Refugee Resettlement Services under federal law.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 23, 2024.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The United Methodist Church in Tukwila is a magnet for those seeking asylum. Federal code does not allow support systems under these

circumstances which was an especially dire problem a few weeks ago when we experienced unusually low temperatures. There were over 500 people living outside in unsanitary conditions. Tried to get the Washington military to provide assistance, but there is no coordinated effort to help in these situations. Hopefully codifying ORIA and allowing them to help more people than they currently can, will help address situations like this. We need a long-term solution, a welcoming center to provide assistance to help people get official status as that opens a lot of doors, which would allow them to work. There are many needs in this state, hopefully others don't see if this as going after restricted resources to their detriment. King County has put up over 300 people in hotels but can't do this themselves. Housing is missing from this legislation. Asylum is long process, so long-term housing is needed.

OTHER: This codifies ORIA and allows the state to help more people than it is able to help now. Washington has long welcomed immigrants.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Bob Hasegawa, Prime Sponsor; Michael Padilla Ocampo, King County; Eli Goss, OneAmerica.

OTHER: Babs Roberts, DSHS - Economic Services Administration - Community Services Division (Director); Sarah Peterson, DSHS - ESA - CSD - Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.