

POLITICS

## Massachusetts to continue accepting refugees following executive order, governor says

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The Trump administration's new executive order not only caps refugee admissions nationwide at 18,000 for the next fiscal year, it also puts the onus on municipalities and states across the country to give written consent to allow refugees resettle into their communities.

Massachusetts is poised to offer that written consent, according to Gov. Charlie Baker's office.

Anisha Chakrabarti, a Baker spokeswoman, said in an email that the commonwealth has always and will continue to welcome refugees.

"The Baker-Polito Administration values the immigrant community's role in making Massachusetts a vibrant and unique place to live and work, and believes the federal government's recent policy decisions restrict the ability of individuals at risk for persecution to seek needed refuge in the United States," Chakrabarti said in a statement.

President Donald Trump announced last week an executive order that lowers the refugee admissions ceiling to 18,000 for the next fiscal year and requires the federal government to obtain written consent from states and municipalities to resettle refugees.



### 'My kids need me': Congolese family among thousands potentially affected by U.S. refugee cap

Under the executive order, the the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health and Human Services must develop and implement a process within 90 days to determine whether a state its municipalities both consent in writing to the resettlement of refugees.

Mary Truong, executive director of the Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, joined immigration advocates and politicians Tuesday in downtown Boston to share the state's position on the refugee cap. She recalled how she arrived in the U.S. as a refugee from Vietnam.

"Without the support of the Americans and American government, I would not be here to do this work," she told refugee resettlement agency leaders and reporters.

## Massachusetts refugee admissions FY 2017

Between Oct. 1, 2018, and Aug. 31, Massachusetts accepted roughly 447 refugees. Unless the state received an influx of refugees before Oct. 1, Massachusetts' refugee admissions will be roughly a quarter of the number of refugees who came to Massachusetts just two years earlier, according to federal data.

The Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants shared data on refugee admissions in the fiscal year 2017. Here's a breakdown of what countries they're fleeing.



Massachusetts refugee admissions FY2017  
Infogram

The state accepted 783 refugees in fiscal year 2018 with the highest numbers per country coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti.

Between Oct. 1, 2018, and May 31, the state became home to 421 refugees with the 159 coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

## Massachusetts refugee admissions FY 2019 (through May 31)

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Jeff Thielman, CEO of the International Institute of New England, said the refugees resettled by his organization quickly find work and contribute to the local economy. He said employers regularly visit his office, inviting them to job fairs and looking to recruit refugees because of the state's low unemployment rate.

"To say no to refugees or immigrants at this point in history is absurd economics," Thielman said during the news conference.

Thielman and other resettlement agency leaders expressed concerns that the executive orders give elected officials grounds to shut their doors to refugees, as the mayors in Springfield and Manchester, New Hampshire, tried to in previous years.

"Most of the cities we resettle in are quite supportive, but there are a few that are not," said Angela Bovill, CEO and president of Ascentria Care Alliance.

In 2011, then Manchester Mayor Ted Gatsas asked the U.S. State Department to halt refugee resettlement so the city could focus on its existing unemployment problem. The department didn't accept to stop refugees from arriving in the

could focus on its existing immigrant population. The department didn't appear to stop refugees from arriving in the city.

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In 2013, [Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno](#) submitted a similar letter to the State Department. Sarno, in a letter to the U.S. State Department, arguing the growing numbers have led to his concern "for the safety of both our citizens and the refugees themselves." Springfield continued to see refugees enter the Western Massachusetts city, but Sarno didn't let up his criticism.

Yusufi Vali, Boston's director of immigrant advancement, said the city is poised to welcome refugees just as it has for Jews fleeing Russia at the turn of the 20th century and Armenians fleeing the Ottoman Empire and other persecuted groups.

"We appreciate how important refugees and immigrants have been to the city of Boston," Vali said.

While states and municipalities decide how to proceed, Thielman pressed the two Congressmen at the meeting, Sen. Ed Markey and challenger Rep. Joe Kennedy, to lobby to increase the refugee cap. Markey has proposed a bill that would increase the cap, but Thielman asked them to ring the alarm on Capitol Hill.

"I'm not giving up hope that the number can't go up from 18,000 higher," Thielman. "I understand that politics is hard, but I would ask both of you while you're here to lobby your chairmen, to lobby the administration to increase that number."

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