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**Testimony of Mary Truong, Executive Director  
Office for Refugees and Immigrants  
Joint Hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means  
March 30, 2021**

Good afternoon Representative Vargas, Senator Rush, and distinguished members of the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means. My name is Mary Truong and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) in the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the Chairs and the members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for the opportunity to address you today and to answer your questions about the Office for Refugees and Immigrants' Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) budget.

As the State Refugee Coordinator, it is my duty to ensure that we support the most vulnerable newcomers to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as they integrate into our communities. Today, more than 83% of ORI's funding comes from federal sources to support the administration of the state's refugee resettlement program.

During FFY 2020 (October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020), a total of 645 new individuals were enrolled into the Massachusetts Refugee Resettlement Program (MRRP), which reflects a decrease of more than 20% from the prior federal fiscal year (814). The majority of these refugees came from Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Haiti, Moldova, and Ukraine. Although refugee arrivals have diminished in number over the past year, their need for MRRP services to support a successful transition to Massachusetts is no less urgent.

Overall, in FFY2020, ORI served more than 5,370 refugees and immigrants across all federal, state, and privately-funded programs. Such programs are designed to assist newcomers at various points along their journeys, spanning from initial resettlement to integration and self-sufficiency.

Despite the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on our programs and services, the Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP) was one of our most successful programs in terms of outcome and number of people served. This program helps low-income legal permanent residents in Massachusetts become naturalized U.S. citizens, which is a vital step to becoming fully engaged community members. Services include: English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)/civics classes, assistance with the long and complex USCIS naturalization application, assistance with the fee waiver, reduced fee waiver, and medical disability waiver applications, interview preparation, and interpretation and referral services. Last year, 90% of all CNAP participants who took the citizenship exam passed. In SFY20, CNAP served 2,672 Massachusetts residents, while expanding its service network to 20 providers across the state including the Cape and Islands. I would like to express my gratitude to Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, and Secretary Sudders for their proposal of \$1,026,574 in state funding in FY2022 to continue support for our citizenship assistance services, which will provide services to over 1,200 refugees and immigrants through grants to the agency's 19 partner organizations. With your help, we can continue to make an impact in people's lives.

I also would like to share outcomes for our Financial Literacy for Newcomers (FLN) Program that is supported partly through this line item. During SFY2021, a total of 50 Online Financial Literacy for Newcomers (FLN) workshops have been hosted thus far, serving over 250 refugees and immigrants in Lynn, Dorchester, Hyde Park, West Springfield, Worcester, Attleboro, Lawrence, and New Bedford with the support of ten FLN providers and 16 subject matter experts. To date, the FLN program has led 146 workshops in 10 languages to nearly 790 participants across the Commonwealth. Through continued efforts and growing partnerships with financial institutions, nonprofits, and various other stakeholders ORI aims to increase the knowledge of the American financial system within refugee and immigrant communities in Massachusetts to help them achieve financial stability and reach their financial goals.

In closing, I would like to say that it is an honor to work on behalf of the state to integrate newcomers into the Commonwealth. I will answer any questions you may have.

Mary Truong, Executive Director