



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

**March 26, 2019**

Good morning Vice Chair Friedman, Representative Garballey and members of the Committee. My name is Mary Truong and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI). I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the Chairs and the members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means for this opportunity to address you today and answer your questions about the Office for Refugees and Immigrants' Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) budget.

ORI's mission is to promote the full participation of refugees and immigrants as self-sufficient individuals and families in the economic, social, and civic life of the Commonwealth. As the State Refugee Coordinator, it is my duty to ensure that these most vulnerable newcomers to the state of Massachusetts are able to integrate with our community as seamlessly as possible. Today, 91% of ORI's funding comes from federal sources in order to support the administration of the state's refugee resettlement program.

During FFY 2018 (October 1, 2017 – September 30, 2018), a total of 783 new individuals were enrolled into the Massachusetts Refugee Resettlement Program (MRRP). This represents a 61% drop from the previous year (FFY 2017) when 1,993 refugees and immigrants resettled in our state. This came as a result of the reduction to the national refugee admission ceiling, from 50,000 to 45,000. The majority of incoming refugees are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and El Salvador. Although the number of refugees is smaller than in the past, the need to integrate refugees using the MRRP has not diminished. Newcomers in particular require services and support to achieve integration, help finding housing, medical care, English language classes, job training, financial literacy support, citizenship assistance, and more to adapt to their new lives. In FFY2018, ORI served more than 6,500 refugees and immigrants across all federal, state and private-funded programs.

ORI strongly advocates for continued support for the Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP). This program helps low-income legal permanent residents in Massachusetts become naturalized U.S. citizens and fully engaged community members. Services include, but are not limited to: English for

speakers of other languages (ESOL)/civics classes; assistance with USCIS naturalization application; interview preparation help; and other support/critical services such as interpretation and referral services. All of these services, administered by CNAP Providers, are closely monitored by ORI to achieve the best possible performance and outcomes for refugees and immigrants.

Last year, CNAP enrolled 1,810 Massachusetts residents and made notable progress by expanding to 18 service providers across the Commonwealth. I'm proud to say that CNAP's administration exceeded its targets for passing the citizenship exam. The goal was for 65% of refugees and immigrants take the citizenship exam to pass it, but in SFY2018 CNAP has achieved an astounding 84% success rate (764 took the citizenship exam and 640 passed it).

I would like to express my gratitude to Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito for their proposal of \$501,575 of state funding to support this important program. The FY20 budget recommendation will help to facilitate the administration and dissemination of CNAP to over 2000 potential citizens. In addition, this funding will help ORI to implement the recommendations of the Latino Advisory Commission by assisting eligible Latinos in applying for citizenship in addition to offering financial literacy training for the Latino community.

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 welcome any questions you may have.