

ANGUS S. KING, JR.
MAINE

359 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
(202) 224-5344
Website: <http://www.King.Senate.gov>

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
BUDGET
INTELLIGENCE
RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

July 17, 2014

The Honorable Eric Holder
Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Attorney General Holder and Secretary Johnson:

The influx of unaccompanied alien children on the southern border of the United States is a humanitarian crisis that we must rise to meet. While this exodus of child refugees from Central America is at the forefront of our minds, we must remember that, for the first time since World War II, there are now more than fifty million displaced people globally. This is not just a humanitarian crisis; this is a human crisis. These are mothers, fathers, children who have fled unspeakable violence, war, and extreme poverty.

The flight of these people is the fruit of many dark hostilities around the world which, unfortunately, have been pushing refugees and asylum-seekers from their homes to safer nations long before the crisis on our southern border. My state, Maine, is the new home for many of these people. As you know, refugees and asylees were often doctors, engineers, and lawyers in their home country and now must rely—for a transition period—on training and assistance from the government to begin their new lives.

Unfortunately, many asylum-seekers must wait years before their cases are heard and they receive work authorization. This puts an enormous strain on both the asylum-seekers and the municipalities in which they live. I am concerned that the humanitarian crisis at the southern border may draw resources away from the current case backlog. While Congress must provide more funding for the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), current funding should not be redirected away from vulnerable populations.

Of particular concern to me are offices that have a “last in, first out” policy for interviewing applicants to make a decision on their cases before they become eligible for employment authorization. I have heard that recent applicants are waiting at least one or two years before their scheduled asylum interviews. I continue to hear from asylum applicants and community stakeholders in Maine regarding the burden this places on Maine asylum-seekers, service providers, and state and municipal governments. I am concerned that if resources are directed toward the crisis at the southern border, these wait times will only increase.

Delay in providing asylum applicants with timely decisions on their cases, as well as delaying work authorization, places a large burden on the applicants, their families, and their communities in Maine. Therefore, I would like to receive information from your offices regarding how possible reprogramming within EOIR and USCIS will adversely affect current asylum-seekers.

I trust that you will oversee any reprogramming with careful consideration for both current and future refugees, and that any reprogramming absolutely necessary to fulfill your responsibilities will be restored with any forthcoming emergency supplemental appropriations. In the meantime, I will do my part here in the Senate to act on the Administration’s supplemental request so that you have adequate funding to address the southern border crisis without taking funding away from other vulnerable populations. Thank you and please have your staff contact Chris Rauscher in my office for follow up.

Sincerely,



ANGUS S. KING, JR.
United States Senator

AUGUSTA
4 Gabriel Drive, Suite F1
Augusta, ME 04330
(207) 622-8292

PRESQUE ISLE
169 Academy Street, Suite A
Presque Isle, ME 04769
(207) 764-5124

SCARBOROUGH
383 US Route 1, Suite 1C
Scarborough, ME 04074
(207) 883-1588