



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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Jewish Family Service Responds to Mayor Sarno's Questions about Refugee Resettlement

Since the ban on refugee resettlement has been lifted for an interim period, refugees who were previously scheduled to arrive through Jewish Family Service were able to have travel rescheduled. Several are scheduled to arrive in the next week. In a [press release on February 7](#), Mayor Sarno of Springfield issued a list of questions about the refugee resettlement program. "The questions in Mayor Sarno's press release touch on the key elements of all refugee resettlement programs and are certainly part of the ongoing conversations we have with all our community partners about resettlement in the Springfield area. We are pleased to take this opportunity to respond and educate the greater Springfield community about our work", said Maxine Stein, JFS CEO. "We are proud to be a part of the greater Springfield community and have a history of over 100 years rooted in this city."

1) How many refugees are actually coming to the City of Springfield?

As the City of Springfield is well aware, Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts (JFS) has been approved by the US State Department and HIAS to resettle 230 refugees in Hampden County during FY2017 (10/1/16 – 9/30/17). This approval follows a formal consultation process conducted last spring with local community partners, the City of Springfield, the MA Office for Refugees and Immigrants, and the MA Department of Public Health. Jewish Family Service shares its annual proposed abstract broadly and publicly before it is submitted to HIAS for approval. It was shared via email with over 130 community partners with an invitation for conversation and feedback. This list includes the Mayor's Chief of Staff, Health Commissioner, and School Superintendent, as well as four additional school system staff with whom JFS is proud to partner on an ongoing basis.

Additionally, JFS CEO Maxine Stein spoke over the phone with the City Health Commissioner, Mayor Sarno's designee for refugee resettlement. Ms. Stein later initiated a meeting with the Mayor's office in July, during which information was shared and both the Mayor's Office and JFS committed to communicating openly about any concerns. It was confirmed that the Health Commissioner continues to be the City's designee, that email communications inviting the City's participation in Quarterly Consultations were being received, and that such invitations should continue to be sent to that office. JFS has not received information about any concerns from the Mayor's Office since that meeting.

2) Are these families being housed in condemned units, as has been done in the past?

NO - JFS adheres to the "decent, safe, and sanitary" housing standards outlined in the State Department contract through which all resettlement agencies do their work. JFS is proud to partner with a number of small private landlords in the City of Springfield with whom our staff works very closely to ensure that housing is appropriate and any issues needing attention are dealt with in a highly responsive manner. JFS is "on-call" 24 hours to address any safety, heating, or other

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challenges that may arise. JFS has not received any information from the City about housing concerns relevant to our clients. It is not the role of JFS or newly-arrived refugees to correct the City's structural issues of blighted or ill-maintained properties. JFS's active commitment to ensuring that our clients are appropriately housed actually ameliorates these problems through active collaboration with landlords for the units where newly-arriving refugees are living.

3) Are these families in need of school and health services?

YES - People who are admitted to the United States as refugees have the same access to public education and health services as any other legal resident of the City and Commonwealth. It is the role of the resettlement agency to ensure that clients are enrolled in local schools and participate in the federally-funded Refugee Health Program, which includes two required refugee health screenings to complete the public health assessment process which begins overseas prior to travel to the United States. JFS staff work very closely with arriving families to identify and address any immediate medical needs and received federal funding for long-term support for any complex medical issues our clients may have.

4) Are there proper translation services being provided?

YES - As noted in the annual abstract, JFS hires case management staff who speak the languages and are of the cultures of the refugees we welcome through our program. It is our experience that this commitment affords a higher quality experience of initial resettlement for our clients and is key to building bridges to the various elements of life in our community. Through a federal grant called the Refugee School Impact program, JFS also provides interpretation services to the Springfield Public Schools to facilitate culturally informed conversations with student, parents, and teachers, as well as for our monthly workshops for refugee families with the Springfield Parent Academy.

5) Are there proper long term wrap around services and follow through?

YES - The US Refugee Resettlement Program provides core services to newly-arriving refugees during an initial resettlement period of 90-days. During those 90 days, it is the role of the local resettlement agency to provide housing, school enrollment, and cultural orientation services, as well as to connect new arrivals with employment services, public assistance supports, and health coverage and care.

Following those 90 days, additional Case Management is available as needed through programs funded by the US Office of Refugee Resettlement. People who arrived as refugees are eligible for this support for up to five years after their arrival in the United States.

Additionally, JFS has invested the resources of our Behavioral Health Department to create a highly specialized Community Support Program (CSP), which ensures that refugee families have cultural and linguistic access to this MassHealth program. JFS does ongoing outreach in the community to inform partners about this resource and to encourage referrals for anyone who arrived in the area as a refugee. JFS has shared information about this program with the Mayor's Office.

Long after our formal service-provider relationship has ended, many of our clients return regularly for assistance with unfamiliar forms, new experiences in employment or school, and to apply for citizenship. JFS staff are leaders in their

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respective immigrant communities and are active in ensuring that anyone in need of support is connected to these services.

For those refugee families who struggle with issues at home, JFS offers an In-Home Therapy program for youth under 21 who are struggling with emotional challenges. We work in partnership with parents to help solve problems both the youth and parents have identified. Services occur in the home or other natural setting at the request of the family.

6) Are there proper transportation services being provided?

YES – JFS staff meets arriving families at the airport and provides transportation for all core services, including medical appointments, school enrollment, employment interviews, public assistance enrollment, food shopping, etc. JFS also orients clients to public transportation and supports clients in preparing and applying for driving permits and licenses.

7) Are there proper employment placement plans?

YES – JFS provides employment services in-house, which includes “English for Employment” classes and personalized employment preparation. Through very diligent partnerships with local employers over 85 percent of employable refugees who arrived last year were placed in permanent jobs with health insurance. Our Employment Coordinator is there every step of the way with assistance applying for jobs, preparation for and accompaniment to interviews, orientation support, coordination of transportation, and daily follow-up with clients and employers. Our employer partners value the strong work ethic, loyalty, and determination of their refugee employees. It is our privilege to prepare newly arriving clients for their first steps toward self-sufficiency in their new home.

8) Are there adequate cultural adjustment strategies being provided?

YES- Preparation for life in the United States begins overseas and continues with a comprehensive Cultural Orientation curriculum that is incorporated into the 90-day resettlement period. Topics include housing, transportation, employment, learning English, education, health and hygiene, budgeting and personal finance, and U.S. laws. This is an encapsulated introduction to the long-term journey of adjustment to life in the United States. JFS also works with local community volunteers through our Family Match and tutoring programs to provide ongoing resources for this transition.

9) Who is paying our city for these additional and supplemental services, which continue to put a strain on our city and school budgets?

As noted above, refugees are legally admitted to the United States and are eligible for the same services as any other resident of the community. Initial resettlement services are funded through the U.S. Department of State. The Refugee School Impact program, employment services, and ongoing Case Management programs are funded through the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Since 1915, Jewish Family Service has been providing exceptional social services, grounded in Jewish values, to support and empower individuals and families from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds.

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