The Role of Policy and Advocacy in Refugee, Immigration, and Torture Treatment Services

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National Symposium:
Connecting Leaders, Impacting Communities & Sustaining Programs:
Strengthening the National Torture Treatment Network
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The Role of Policy and Advocacy in Refugee, Immigration, and Torture Treatment Services
We’ve been through a lot together!

- PRM housing crisis support in 2009
- Doubled R&P grant in 2010, continued increases
- Iraqi refugees & SIV program
- Floor Funding
- Refugee provisions in immigration reform
- Stopped cuts to ORR & MRA for 3 years in a row
- Unaccompanied children
- Reprogrammed funds
- Trafficking Victims Protection Act
- Anti-refugee sentiment
- Three pro-refugee bills
- Torture Victims Relief Act
Building a Movement

- Celebrate wins
- Deepen understanding
  - Long term goals
  - Short term goals
  - Strategies
  - Tactics
- Build sustainable teams
- Grow political power
  - Community education, increasing numbers
  - Continual team actions, events, meetings
  - Building relationships w/ policy makers
  - Civic engagement
Congressional Update

- House & Senate pursuing anti-immigrant and refugee legislation
  - Increase enforcement but inadequately fund ORR
  - Rollback anti-trafficking protections for children
  - Ban any renewal or expansion of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)
  - Also introduced legislation that would negatively impact the asylum system
- ORR replenished the $94 million reprogrammed from refugee services for the increase in unaccompanied immigrant children
- ORR doesn’t have funding to meet the needs of all populations in their care and prevent any future cuts but cuts have been avoided, UACs addressed for now.
- TVRA is in the President’s budget at 11 million dollars.
Unaccompanied Children

- 2004-2011: 7,000 and 8,000 annually
- 2013: 24,000 children, 2014: 60,000 children

- More girls, younger children arriving, more victims of trauma
- Fewer Mexicans, more from Guatemala, El Salvador & Honduras

- Asylum requests by Guatemalans, Hondurans & Salvadorans in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Belize increased by 712 percent since 2009, even more fleeing internally

- Recent data from Syracuse University shows that 79.5% of children released to a relative are showing up for court - and even more - 95.1% are showing up when they have a lawyer.
**Trafficking Victims Protection Act**

- To keep children from being returned back into the hands of traffickers and gangs
- Passed both chambers of Congress by unanimous consent
- Signed into law by President Bush.

Changes would mean children would not have a meaningful opportunity to:
- have their story heard,
- apply for asylum,
- or be cared for by child welfare personnel

Children would be deported to life-threatening situations.

More than 300 faith-based organizations and 4,000 people of faith have urged Congress and the Administration to uphold these protections, supported by 70% of the public.
History of The Torture Victims Relief Act

TVRA helps centers that treat torture survivors broaden their approaches to treatment and prevention and train mainstream providers.

- 1994: Senator Dave Durenberger (R-MN) introduces TVRA
- 1994-1995: TVRA is re-introduced in the House by Congressmen Christopher Smith (R-NJ) and Tom Lantos (D-CA) and in the Senate by Senators Paul Wellstone (D-MN) and Arlen Specter (R-PA)
- 1995-1996: TVRA is introduced by the same House Members and by Senators Paul Wellstone and Rod Grams (R-MN)
- 1996-1997: Congress enacts TVRA
- 1998: President Clinton signs it into law

ORR continues to play a prominent role in planning and disbursing grants from TVRA funds to torture treatment centers throughout the United States. 30 programs in 19 states are currently funded.
Current Asks

- Increase funding for ORR
- Reject rollbacks to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPRA)
- Protect the U.S. asylum system
- Support international programs to reduce reasons why children have to flee
- Protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
- Administratively expand Deferred Action and stop deportations
- TVRA was introduced
Good Refugee Legislation last Congress

Strengthening Refugee Resettlement Act, H.R. 651

Rep. Ellison (D-MN-5)
- Admit refugees as LPRs
- Expand MG, R&P, case management
- Domestic resettlement emergency fund

Refugee Protection Act, S. 645 and H.R. 1375

Sen. Leahy (D-VT) and Rep. Lofgren (D-CA-14)
- Eliminate one-year filing deadline
- Protect refugee families
- Authority to designate groups for resettlement (“Lautenberg”)

Domestic Refugee Resettlement Reform & Modernization Act

Sen. Stabenow (D-MI), Sen. Collins (R-ME) S. 883
- Elevates ORR within the HHS bureaucracy
- Allows formula state funding to include projected arrivals
- Helps with data collection & assistance to secondary migrants
Refugee Provisions in CIR

All refugee provisions in the original bill S.744 remained:

- Elimination of the 1-year filing deadline
- Family reunification provisions for refugee families
- Authority to designate certain groups of humanitarian concern for resettlement
- Extension of the Afghan and Iraqi SIV programs
- Provisions to help stateless individuals gain LPR status
- Representation at overseas refugee interviews and improves “Request for Review” process
Gradually Build Champions

- Assess where each of your policy makers are
  - Do they know who refugees are?
  - Have they met a refugee?
  - What are their misperceptions?
- Determine how to best engage each policy maker
  - Who are the best messengers?
  - What are the best messages?
  - Start with an “easy ask” – meeting a refugee, attending an event, speaking at a ceremony
  - Be ready for a “hard ask” – cosponsoring a bill, defending against anti-refugee sentiment, funding
- Serve as a resource for staff/ constituent referrals
- Attend community events
- Build a mutual relationship with staff and member
Photo Op!

What’s more patriotic than a citizenship ceremony, or a celebration of refugees in your community?

Invite policy makers to:
• Conduct citizenship oath
• Teach a civics or ESL class
• Take a photo w/refugees
• Introduce refugees
• Attend or speak at World Refugee Day
Every Voice Heard

Events show community support

- Share photos with policy makers and encourage them to attend next time!
- Invite staffers and community partners
- Make an event announcement to:
  - Call a policymaker – right now! all together!
  - Sign up for refugee advocacy alerts
  - Write or sign letters in support of refugees or thanking a policy maker
  - Start or grow an advocacy team!
Meet with your Reps & Senators

- Critical to educating them about the vital role that refugees play in your communities

- Ideal group for such a meeting:
  - Refugee who can share a powerful story
  - Director of an agency or a case manager who knows the ins and outs of program work
  - Faith leader
  - Business leader
  - Volunteer or respected community member

- Who you are. Why you care. What you want.

- Compelling. Concrete. Concise.
Core Principles of Organizing

• What are we changing?
  How does our work for welcoming communities and refugee and immigrant rights win or create concrete improvements in people’s lives?

• What are we building?
  How are we creating and sustaining teams of people who can take action together for change?
Lessons Learned from National Consortium of Torture Treatment Programs

- What issues are relevant to people?
  - TVRA
  - Leverage resources

- What were the most successful initiatives, and why?
  - Shadow Report
  - Sign in letters
Step 1: Internal Assessment

- What am I passionate about? Why? What in my life journey has brought about this passion?
- What policy changes (national and local) would you and your community like to see?
- How could I see my community working to be part of bringing that change about?
- What does being an “advocate” mean to you?
Step 2: One on One Relationship Building

- Face to face
- Intentional conversation, not an interview
- Listening for passion, vision, stories
- Work together to identify others
- Find a Partner!
  - Who is one person who might most share your vision and help you build / energize a Team?
Step 3: Grow your Team!

Domino Effect of 1 on 1 meetings!

- Who else might care / be interested?
- Ask: can you now reach out to 3-5 more people?
- Set a timeline for a Team meeting
Step 4: Bring the team together

- Goal: solid group of 8-10 people
- Create a common vision: One year from now, what are our hopes and expectations?
- Create an action plan: How do we build toward that?
- Who are natural allies who can be energized into being advocates?
- Decide on next steps
Sample Advocacy Calendar

- Oct – Dec: ORR funding letters, meetings; civic engagement stories, events, media
- Jan – May: Team building, community education, expanding base
- June: World Refugee Day/UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture events, meetings
- July – Sept: Meetings with members of congress, letters, emails, calls
Resources

- Toolkits for congressional visits:
  - Refugee Council USA: rcusa.org/wrd2014

- Information on Senators, Representatives, Committees: www.senate.gov and www.house.gov

- We send updates on legislation as part of the Monday bulletin. Sign up for advocacy alerts:
  - cwsglobal.org/speakout
  - bit.ly/refugeeadvocacy
  - www.interfaithimmigration.org

- Join quarterly National Refugee Advocacy Calls. Next Call: 12:00 PM EST Friday, November 7th.

- Thank you Jen Smyers of Church World Service!
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