



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gulf Coast JFCS Directed by federal contractor, HIAS, to immediately cease the provision of services for 170 newly arrived refugees in Tampa Bay.

(CLEARWATER, FL – January 29, 2025) – At 11:57 pm last night our agency received an email and memo from HIAS officials, noting they were directed by the federal government to immediately cease all services to newly arrived refugees and special immigrant visa holders (SIVs). Refugees are not undocumented immigrants, did not enter the United States illegally, and in all cases have been fully vetted, background checked and “invited” to the United States. Most of our newly arrived refugees and SIVs were granted entrance into the United States because of their having supported our military during recent wars, or due to extreme and unfavorable conditions in their native country that forced them to flee. Most have spent significant time in refugee camps, waiting for United Nations countries to select them.

The federal government’s confusing language in two OMB directives noted they would not halt support to individuals and that the focus of immigration efforts would be on “removable people” who have engaged in criminal acts. Federal assistance to Tampa Bay’s refugees and SIVs is provided on an individual basis, and they are generally not categorized as removable persons.

This cease work order is not only inhumane, but it also puts the onus on nonprofits that are already underfunded while doing the work of our state and federal governments, to “deal with it.” Because all this work is done on a cost reimbursement basis, there is no fountain of resources to help us to transition these families with dignity. The current situation would have us walk away, turn our backs, and release vulnerable, new neighbors into the streets and into homeless shelters. We would also add 50 employees to the state’s unemployment roll.

Help Us to Help Them

Instead, we are calling on all Tampa Bay residents and humanitarians to help us to help them. They need employment and are eligible to work. Their status as refugees and SIVs grants them an immediate right to work. They need housing. We need support for our workforce so they can assist refugees in meeting their basic needs (enrolling children in school, securing jobs and housing, etc....). This manufactured crisis and “pause” does not stop the very real local crisis that is pending if we do nothing, as directed.

Here's how you can help:

- Purchase items from the Gulf Coast JFCS Refugee Services [Amazon Registry](#)



- Hire a refugee – [contact the Director of Refugee Integration Services](#)
- [Connect our team](#) to affordable apartments
- Make cash donations to the Gulf Coast JFCS Refugee Assistance Fund or our Hope and Dignity Fund that will be used to offset housing costs for as close to 90 days as possible
- Speak to our federal elected officials and urge Congress to act
- Reach out to Secretary Rubio to:
 - Reverse course by excluding the R&P program from the definition of “foreign development assistance”, as used in the President’s Executive Order on [“Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid”](#)
 - Revoke the stop work orders and permit a resumption in R&P services for all eligible populations, including refugees and certain SIVs
 - Alternatively, as described in section 3(d) of the President’s Executive Order on foreign aid, grant a waiver allowing for the immediate resumption in R&P services for all eligible populations.
 - Encourage the President to rescind the [Executive Order on the USRAP](#), signed and implemented on January 22nd, resulting in immediate suspension of the U.S. resettlement program and cancellation of flights for refugees who were already booked for travel. Until the USRAP resumes full operations, the administration should at least provide for the resettlement of particularly vulnerable refugees or those with urgent needs on a case-by-case basis, as provided by the Executive Order.

Lastly, it is imperative to end misinformation as to the status of refugees. We offer several local experts who can answer related questions including:

- Sylvia Acevedo, Director, Refugee Wellness Programs
- Abdel Dana Roca, Director, Director of Refugee Integration Services
- Elke Cumming, Sr. Vice President for Programs and Administration

ABOUT GULF COAST JFCS: Protecting the vulnerable, strengthening families, and empowering individuals throughout the state of Florida since 1974, Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services (Gulf Coast JFCS) is a Clearwater-based 501(c)3 organization supporting more than 30,000 diverse individuals and families of all backgrounds annually through its numerous programs across Greater Tampa Bay and beyond. Learn more about Gulf Coast JFCS at www.gulfcoastjfcs.org.