

# Spotlight Report

## ON DEFENDING REFUGEES

Issue 14 | March 2026



# A Message From the CEO

The [Refugee Act of 1980](#) passed with a large bipartisan majority in the U.S. House of Representatives and a unanimous vote in the U.S. Senate. The shared desire to establish a humanitarian refugee program stemmed from the mass displacement caused by three decades of war in Vietnam, as well as lingering memories of World War II-era displacement. Across the political spectrum, Americans agreed that a nation defined by its commitment to freedom should welcome people fleeing persecution.

While the U.S. had a long history of welcoming refugees, the country had not previously implemented a formal program. For decades, decisions on whom to welcome to the U.S. were debated during active crises. Different arrangements were offered to different populations depending on the prevailing politics of the moment. In 1980, Americans agreed that we should have a standardized, well-supported system for welcoming and integrating refugee families and individuals into our communities.

The Act granted rights and protection to refugees, including the right to join the workforce; eligibility to apply for lawful permanent residency status—a green card—after one year; and the opportunity to apply for citizenship after five years of residence and proof of dedication to U.S. laws, values, and culture. Refugees also were guaranteed standard Constitutional protections, including the same due process and equal rights promised to all under U.S. laws.

Since its creation, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program has saved the lives of more than 3 million people, and with the help of compassionate supporters like you, IINE has resettled thousands of refugees who have fled conflict zones and repressive governments. Refugees have made New England a more prosperous, innovative, and culturally dynamic place to live.

Devastatingly, we are now seeing a profound betrayal of the promises our country made to refugees 45 years ago—a return to the chaos and discrimination of the past. With “Operation PARRIS,” which stands for “Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening,” the current federal administration is subjecting refugees in our communities to “re-interviewing,” even though they have already endured extensive vetting. In February, when the federal government expanded its efforts to target refugees by introducing a new nationwide policy allowing for warrantless arrest and indefinite detention, IINE responded by joining *Jean A. et al v. Noem*, a [lawsuit](#) challenging the policy. This *Spotlight Report* dives deeper into these attacks on refugee rights and how IINE and our communities are pushing back.

Thank you for standing with us, and most importantly, with our refugee community members—together, our voices will be stronger and louder.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey Thielman".

**Jeffrey Thielman**  
President & CEO, IINE

# The Federal Government's Targeting of Refugees

## A Recent Timeline

### November 24, 2025

After a tragic shooting in Washington, DC, involving an Afghan national who was granted asylum by the Trump administration, the president announces the intention to “re-interview” all Afghan refugees admitted under President Biden, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) halts processing of immigration requests for all Afghan nationals, including Afghans who previously put their lives on the line to support U.S. operations in their country.



Photo Credit: Lorie Shaull

### January 9, 2026

During a surge of immigration enforcement activity in Minnesota—which resulted in the death of multiple individuals—the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and USCIS announce a plan to target 5,600 Minnesotan refugees who have not yet obtained green cards for “re-vetting.”

### January 28

A successful lawsuit halts the Minnesota operation. In the ruling, a federal judge writes: “Refugees have a legal right to be in the United States, a right to work, a right to live peacefully—and importantly, a right not to be subjected to the terror of being arrested and detained without warrants or cause in their homes or on their way to religious services or to buy groceries. **At its best, America serves as a haven of individual liberties in a world too often full of tyranny and cruelty. We abandon that ideal when we subject our neighbors to fear and chaos.**”



Photo Credit: Chad Davis

### January 10-28

ICE claims to be investigating fraud in Minnesota but produces no evidence or warrants before pulling hundreds of refugees from their homes and neighborhoods. Many are taken far from their families to detention centers in Texas, then abruptly released and expected to find their way home.

# The Federal Government's Targeting of Refugees (Cont.)

## A Recent Timeline



### February 18

DHS releases a new memo expanding the scope of Operation PARRIS to re-vetting all refugees admitted between 2021-2024 throughout the U.S. who have not yet obtained green cards. Under the memo, 235,026 refugees are threatened with detention for a non-crime. Their homes and livelihoods are put at risk, and they are subject to being “re-interviewed”—forced to recount the most traumatic incidents of their life to defend their right to continue living in the U.S. peacefully.

### February 27

IINE responds by joining *Jean A. et al v. Noem*, a [lawsuit](#) challenging the policy alongside six courageous refugees and our partners at Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts.

**“Litigation is not our standard method of advocacy, but when the federal government directly targets refugees—resilient, hardworking community members who escaped persecution and were promised safety by our nation—we must stand up and speak out,”** said Jeff Thielman, IINE President and CEO.

### March 23

IINE and our partners secure a major win in the lawsuit when a federal court in Massachusetts blocks the Refugee Detention Policy nationwide while the case proceeds. The court finds that refugees are likely to succeed on the merits of their claims and that they would face irreparable harm without court intervention. The ruling temporarily prevents DHS from enforcing the policy, ensuring refugee families will not be detained or separated.



# How IINE Can Protect Our Refugee Clients

Right now, IINE is focused on:

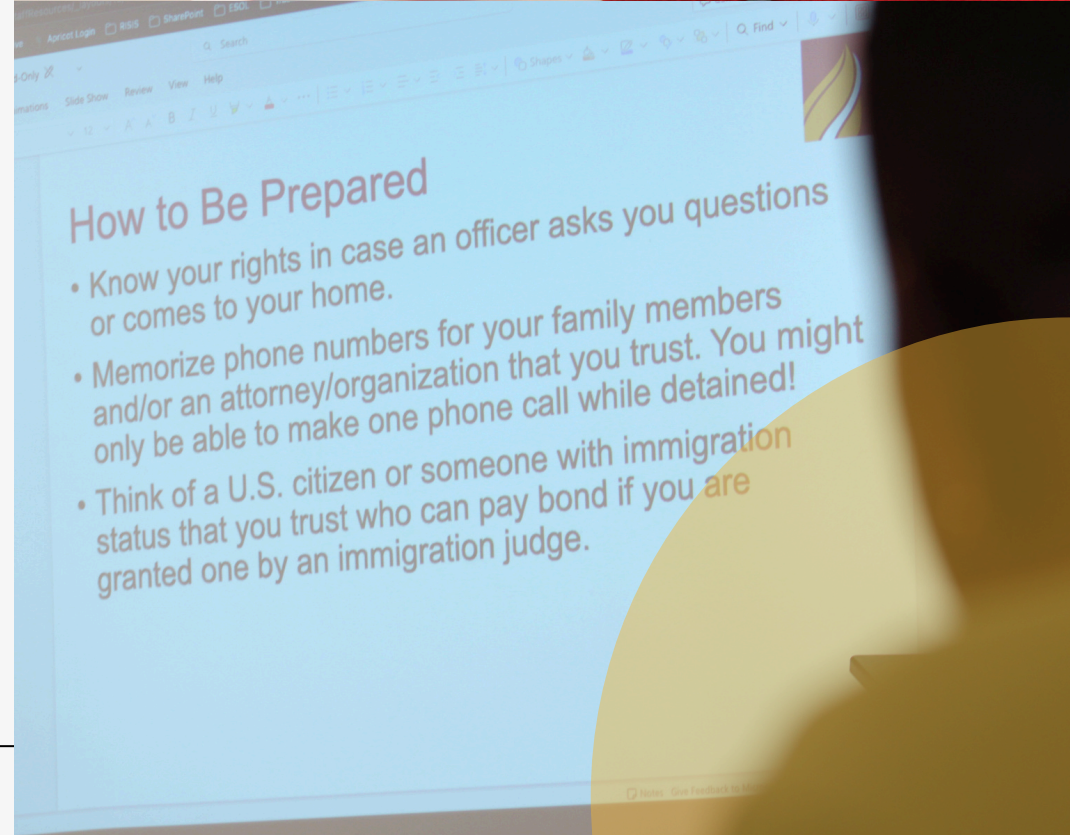
- **Filing Green Card Applications:** Our Immigration Legal Services team continues to submit client applications so they can be processed as soon as suspensions and delays are lifted.
- **Informing:** IINE case managers are reaching out to the 1,000+ refugees whom we helped resettle since 2021 and notifying them of what they might see from DHS, how to prepare for the possibility of re-vetting, and how IINE will support them.
- **Preparing:** Know Your Rights workshops and Family Preparedness trainings teach clients how best to interact with officials and help them ensure that their children are cared for in the event they are detained.

IINE will provide:

- **Accompaniment:** IINE legal staff are taking action in anticipation of representing clients at re-vetting appointments and USCIS interviews.
- **Family Reunification:** If families in our care are separated, IINE will work to locate refugees and advocate for their release.

With additional resources, IINE can offer:

- **Emergency Support:** IINE can help families in the instance of prolonged separation or loss of housing or employment due to detention.



## Living in the Shadows *Abdulrahmn's Story*

After escaping conflict in Sudan, Abdulrahmn spent six years in a Nigerian refugee camp before getting approval to come to the U.S. He arrived in Boston in early 2024, his limbs freezing despite wearing a jacket.

With help from IINE, he moved into a home with other refugees and enrolled in English classes. Five months later, he landed a job at a local restaurant, where he's worked since.

Abdulrahmn applied for a green card in early 2025. He's still waiting for a response from USCIS.

He had long dreamt of exploring Boston and traveling to New York City and D.C., but those dreams feel far away now. These days, he and his roommates go to work and come straight home.

**"I don't try to go anywhere else because I'm worried. I feel I'm under pressure."**

Read Abdulrahmn's full interview, and insights from IINE President and CEO Jeff Thielman, in *Axios Boston*: ["Boston-area refugees in limbo as Trump admin. upends program."](#)

# 729



Green card applications submitted by IINE for refugee clients between fiscal years 2021-2025

## How You Can Help



### Donate

Standing up in court and protecting families requires significant, flexible resources. Philanthropic support gives us the ability to respond quickly, expand legal capacity, and ensure families remain safe and stable while the lawsuit moves forward.



### Contact Your Representatives

Share the truth about the refugee program and how refugee protections are being violated. Find resources on our Advocacy webpage.