

**Statement of Simon Henshaw
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
U.S. Department of State
Before the
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest
April 23, 2015**

Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Schumer, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, the Department of State appreciates the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee on Immigration and The National Interest along with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to talk about the Administration's new in-country refugee/parole program for certain minors in Central America. The U.S. government is taking an integrated and comprehensive approach to address the underlying economic and security challenges facing Central American countries and the unlawful migration of unaccompanied minors across the U.S. border. The Administration has launched the refugee/parole program as part of that effort. As previewed in the Administration's FY15 Report to Congress on Proposed Refugee Admissions and in consultations with Congress last September, this in-country refugee and parole processing program allows certain parents who are lawfully present in the United States to request U.S. resettlement for their children currently still in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.

The Administration established the program to provide a safe, legal, and orderly alternative to the dangerous journey that some children are currently undertaking to join their parents in the United States. Our goal is to extend protection to those children with legitimate humanitarian claims while providing an effective alternative to irregular migration driven by dangerous criminal smuggling networks. Taken together with the efforts of Central American leaders and other U.S. government efforts, we believe this measure will help keep people from sending children on this dangerous journey. Addressing these issues requires cooperation and partnership –with Central American governments taking the lead in creating better economic, social, governance and security conditions; and with the private sector, development banks, and international donors. That is why the Obama Administration has asked Congress for one billion dollars in assistance for the region. This is critical, as is having a fairer, safer, and more humane system for identifying children eligible for humanitarian protection and bringing them to the United States.

To apply, an eligible parent in the United States must complete a form with the assistance of a State Department-funded resettlement agency. There are nearly 350 such agencies across the United States in 180 communities. This list is available on our website where we also have information in Spanish and English. Once an application is submitted by a parent, a caseworker from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), acting on the U.S. Government's behalf, will contact the child in one of the three countries to arrange an in-person pre-screening appointment. A parent of the child still living in the country of origin may be added to the child's case, if that parent resides with the child and is currently married to the U.S.-based parent who filed the petition.

After IOM conducts the initial pre-screening with each minor, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will conduct interviews with the minor to determine whether he or she is eligible for refugee resettlement, including whether he or she meets the refugee definition in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Section 101(a)(42) and is otherwise admissible to the United States. All applicants must complete all required security checks and obtain a medical clearance prior to travel to the United States. For approved refugees, the Resettlement Support Center (RSC) will arrange travel to the United States.

There is a required DNA testing component to this program – to verify biological parent-child relationships claimed in the application. DNA testing is a mechanism to deter fraudulent relationship claims in order to gain access to the program, a measure we already employ successfully in our refugee family reunification program. Once the U.S.-based parent is notified to initiate the DNA testing process, he or she arranges and covers the costs for a certified lab to ship a testing kit to the child's location. When the biological relationship is verified, the lab sends the results to both the parent initiating the process and to the Department of State, which coordinates further processing. DHS then takes the lead in reviewing the case to verify which applicants will have access to the program.

Children admitted as refugees under this program will be assigned to a U.S.-based resettlement agency that will facilitate reunification with the parent and help the child after arrival with such things as enrolling in school. Children found by USCIS to be at risk of harm but not eligible for refugee resettlement will be considered on a case-by-case basis for parole, which is a discretionary mechanism under U.S. law to allow someone to come to the United States for urgent

humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. USCIS will provide more detail on the parole component of the program.

We have received 565 applications to date: 439 for El Salvador, 114 for Honduras, and 12 for Guatemala. These applications are being processed and we hope to begin USCIS interviews in May or June for those who have submitted the required DNA evidence of the parent-child relationship. If an applicant informs us that he or she is facing imminent danger, we have the capacity to expedite processing and/or work with NGO and IO partners to identify safe shelter as appropriate. The Department of State continues to monitor the protection environments for the children in each of the three countries to assess the needs of the minors during the application period. The Department of State is in regular contact with NGOs operating in the region to assess the changing environment and provide further guidance and training on the program, as necessary.

The Department of State and USCIS have conducted considerable outreach on this program, and the results are beginning to show with increased applications in recent weeks. Overall, the Department of State has explained this program to almost 40 media outlets since December. We have conducted more than 20 interviews with Spanish-language media in the United States and the region. Additionally, we have provided information to the press via a dozen background interviews. We continue to collaborate with DHS/USCIS to engage the embassies and consulates of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras present in the United States as well as other stakeholders in the United States via outreach seminars. Fact sheets and frequently asked questions are available in Spanish and English on the Department of State/PRM and USCIS websites. Finally, with the support of our embassies abroad we continue to expand outreach efforts in all three countries.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about this humanitarian program that is designed to provide a safe, legal, and orderly alternative to the dangerous journey that some children are undertaking to reach the U.S. I would be happy to answer any questions.