

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#1)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Could screenings be better timed to avoid needless duplication and delay?

As several of the witnesses discuss in their testimony, applicants for resettlement in the United States go through a number of different screenings. As I understand it, these screenings generally have a limited validity period. If a certain amount of time has passed since the screening and an applicant has not resettled in the United States, the screening expires and the applicant has to start over. It is possible that a refugee could be delayed through no fault of her own if one screening expires before another can be completed, and the refugee has to endure the hassle, the expense, and the delay associated with completing the same screening twice. In some cases, an entire family could have their screenings expire while they wait for one family member to get final approval.

- a. This question is for whoever can speak to the issue. It may be a few of you. Is the Administration considering ways to better time the resettlement application process to ensure that applicants do not have to needlessly go through the same screenings multiple times?
- b. This seems like an area where the resettlement process could be made more efficient without any cost in terms of security. I would like to work with you on this. Would you keep me updated?

Answer:

The Administration continues to identify efficiency measures to streamline refugee admissions processing while still upholding rigorous security vetting requirements. Prior to travel, refugees undergo a wide range

of security checks and need to clear a medical exam. Each of these checks has different validity periods, and some checks are initiated at different time periods throughout the process. The Administration is reviewing the end-to-end processing workflow to identify where processing can be made more efficient. We are also working to develop more rigorous data analytics to guide when checks should be re-requested to try to maximize the potential for an approved, cleared refugee to travel to the United State before another check expires.

We appreciate your interest and will keep Congress apprised of improvements to the refugee admissions process.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What happens when an entire family is delayed because a single family member has not been approved?

As you know, families frequently apply to resettle together. For a family to be accepted, each member must be screened and approved. I have heard concerns that, as a result, entire families will often be stalled because a single family member's application has gotten delayed.

- a. How often does that kind of thing happen—where a family is held up because of a single family member or maybe two family members?
- b. Do you have a process for expediting consideration of particular applicants when clearing one applicant would allow an entire family to move forward? Can you describe that process? How often do you use it?

It seems to me that, if an entire family is delayed because of a single family member, the family might want to know what is going on. Then the family could choose whether to continue their application as a group or to let the approved members of the family move forward and leave the delayed member to follow them later.

- c. Do you inform families when the whole family has been stalled because the application of a particular family member has been delayed?
- d. If not, would you be willing to consider doing so?

Answer:

The Administration recognizes the challenges that families face when their cases are delayed. When a case is delayed due to a single family member, it is most commonly due to potential concerns related to the security vetting checks for the family member. In this scenario, a case cannot move forward to travel until the Department of Homeland Security makes a final adjudication on the case, including the security checks. If there is a negative vetting determination made for one member of the family, the case for the entire family is closed and no one in the family can travel to the United States as a refugee.

For cases with urgent protection needs, there is a process for expediting the final adjudication of the case, including the disposition of the security checks. However, if the final determination is a denial for even one individual on a case, the denial will apply to all members of a case.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#3)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What did you learn in Irbil about the treatment of Iraqi religious minorities?

Mr. Bartlett, as you likely know, I recently led a letter to Secretary Kerry concerning the protection of Iraqi religious minorities and the need to improve Iraqi refugee processing times. In particular, my colleagues and I requested Secretary Kerry to designate a Priority Two (P2) category for the persecuted religious minorities in Iraq. Further, we asked the State Department to accelerate processing times by: 1) doubling the number of personnel tasked with processing Iraqi refugees; 2) working with DHS to explore videoconferencing capabilities for interviewing refugees; 3) identifying non-governmental organizations to work with the U.S. Embassy to identify and screen religious minorities seeking in-country refugee assistance; and 4) establishing a facility in Irbil where refugee applicants can be processed.

I am aware that you traveled to Irbil a few weeks ago to meet with international organizations and explore options to address the overwhelming number of refugees.

- a. What were the major lessons or points you took away from this trip?

Answer:

Following my trip to Erbil, we moved forward in working with the UN and other organizations to establish a P-1 (individual referral) program for a small number of extremely vulnerable women and girls from religious minorities, including Yezidis in northern Iraq. We plan to commence the

identification process this month and begin interviewing cases in the January-February timeframe. We plan to have quarterly interview teams in Erbil throughout 2016.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#4)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

How many IACs are stuck in limbo, and how can that be resolved?

As you know, applicants for resettlement go through a screening known as the Interagency Check, or IAC. This process is in addition to a number of other biographic and biometric checks that applicants have to undergo. My understanding is that sometimes IACs are, at least initially, inconclusive. Applicants get back a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision”—meaning they have been neither approved nor denied. I have heard concerns that applicants who have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” are left in limbo and not given a chance to clear up whatever ambiguity led to them receiving an inconclusive check.

- a. As of today, how many applicants for resettlement have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” but not yet had their cases resolved?
- b. Do you give applicants the opportunity to provide information you need to move their cases from inconclusive to resolved?
- c. Would you look into whether more can be done to let resettlement applicants help clarify any ambiguities in their checks—provided they can do so without accessing classified materials?

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and

is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the security screening process and USCIS approvals and denials.