

HOUSE No. 4724

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, April 26, 2022.

The committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities to whom was referred the petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 242) of David Henry Argosky LeBoeuf, Vanna Howard and Elizabeth A. Malia for legislation to establish a special commission to study the current refugee resettlement infrastructure and ensure the successful integration of refugees in Massachusetts, reports recommending that the accompanying bill (House, No. 4724) ought to pass.

For the committee,

MICHAEL J. FINN.

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In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court
(2021-2022)

An Act creating a special commission to study the current refugee resettlement infrastructure and ensure the successful integration of refugees in Massachusetts.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 6 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as appearing in the 2018
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after Section 208A the following section:-

3 Section 208B: (a) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, there is
4 hereby established a special commission to study and make recommendations concerning the
5 infrastructure of refugee resettlement agencies in the Commonwealth, their breadth of services,
6 where services are lacking, and how the Commonwealth can best work in conjunction with the
7 federal government to rebuild and support an infrastructure of refugee resettlement agencies that
8 promotes sustainable long-term integration.

9 (b) The commission shall consist of no less than 19 members: The House and Senate
10 Chairs of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, who shall
11 serve as Co-Chairs, the Executive Director of the Office for Refugees and Immigrants or their
12 designee, the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services or their designee,
13 the Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance or their designee, the

14 Undersecretary of the Department of Housing and Community Development or their designee,
15 the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families or their designee; 1 representative
16 of the International Institute of New England; 1 representative of Ascentria Care Alliance; 1
17 representative of Jewish Family Service Metrowest; 2 additional representatives of refugee
18 resettlement agencies within the Commonwealth; 1 individual of the Massachusetts Immigrant
19 and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, 2 individuals with lived experience as refugees; 1
20 representative of an employer or labor union that directly employs refugees; 1 representative of a
21 job training program that works directly with refugees; and 2 individuals with expertise in one or
22 more of the following areas: public and affordable housing, federal immigration law and
23 regulation, emergency management, the needs of forcibly displaced individuals.

24 (c) The commission shall, at a minimum, investigate, collect data and make
25 recommendations on: (1) the state of the existing reception and placement structure in
26 Massachusetts, including but not limited to: (i) current efforts to resettle refugees, including
27 efforts to assist refugees in obtaining adequate housing, healthcare, education, transfer of
28 professional licensure and workforce development training; (ii) any failures or gaps in resources
29 that exist in the current system of services for refugees and recently resettled individuals; (iii)
30 where funds should be allocated to strengthen current systems or address gaps in services; (iv)
31 any failures or gaps that exist due to the systematic dismantling of the federal refugee program
32 over the previous 5 years; and (v) how the Commonwealth can support the rebuilding of a strong
33 refugee resettlement structure; (2) the state of the current integration system in place for refugees
34 in the Commonwealth, including but not limited to: (i) a study of the current integration pipeline
35 and the systems in place to assist refugees from time of arrival through end of services; (ii)
36 identification of gaps that exist in the current system including a study of any potential sudden

37 and often unexpected decrease in public benefits that can occur with a small increase in earnings
38 that exists in the structure as it stands currently; and (iii) public policy and funding structures that
39 the Commonwealth should support to ensure the successful long-term integration of refugees
40 into our society and workforce.

41 (d) The commission may create committees and working groups to inform the
42 commission's investigation of the topics referenced in SECTION 1(c). The commission, its
43 committees and its working groups may procure services, including consulting services, and
44 otherwise involve experts, stakeholders, and members of the public. The commission shall be
45 supported by staff from the Massachusetts office for refugees and immigrants.

46 (e) Members of the commission shall be named and the commission shall commence its
47 work within 60 days of the effective date of this act. The commission shall report to the general
48 court and governor the results of its study, together with any draft legislation, regulations or
49 administrative procedure necessary to better serve refugees resettling in the Commonwealth by
50 filing the same with the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives and the director of
51 the office of refugees and immigrants not more than 1 year after the effective date of this act.