



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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Expanding Income Disregards for Refugee Cash Assistance

Policy Letter 23-04

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In response to increasing newcomer arrivals, the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) are continuing to develop innovative methods to augment the capacity of the United States to serve refugees¹, in complement to or to enhance the national refugee resettlement network Reception and Placement (R&P) grants. Such PRM and ORR resettlement initiatives² are designed to leverage additional partners and channel the support of receiving communities through novel resettlement programming; increase the use of community partners, including institutional commitments; and tap into the benefits and opportunities that private sponsorship, established under a PRM-approved framework, can provide incoming refugees.

Each of these initiatives offers similar benefits and services as the traditional R&P program and may provide a cash grant to newly arriving refugees. Decades ago, when ORR drafted regulations pertaining to Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) income disregards, ORR did not envision that other initial resettlement initiatives would exist outside of R&P. Therefore, ORR drafted its regulations to limit income disregards only to cash grants from R&P when conducting a refugee's income eligibility determination for RCA.

ORR is issuing this policy letter (PL) to provide guidance to states³ on disregarding from income cash grants refugees may receive from various federal resettlement initiatives. The guidance aims to facilitate equitable distribution of RCA among refugees regardless of the resettlement initiative under which they are served and enable refugees to receive the maximum amount of RCA for which they are eligible. Through this policy, ORR wants to ensure that refugees maximize short-term assistance so that they can be better positioned to achieve economic self-sufficiency and integration into their state and local communities.

¹ In the context of this PL, ORR uses the term “refugees” to include those ORR-eligible populations who are refugees and additional individuals (e.g., certain Afghans who arrived through Operation Allies Welcome) who are eligible for initial resettlement services as authorized by section 412(b)(1) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The term “refugees” here does not include asylees, Cuban/Haitian Entrants, victims of human trafficking, humanitarian parolees from Ukraine, or other ORR-eligible populations who are not eligible for initial resettlement services

² Examples include the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA) program, the State Administered Placement Assistance (SAPA) program, the Virtual Afghan Placement and Assistance (VAPA) Program, and the public-private

³ Throughout this PL, “states” refer to States and Replacement Designees funded to administer the ORR RCA program.

I. Challenge

Upon arrival, most refugees have no family or social safety net in the United States and need all the assistance for which they are eligible to rebuild their lives. Within the first few days of resettling in their state of final destination, refugees visit local benefits offices to see if they qualify for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and if ineligible for TANF, for RCA.

ORR regulations 45 C.F.R. § 400.66(d) (for publicly administered programs) and 45 C.F.R. § 400.59(d) (for public/private RCA programs or PPPs) mandate that states and PPPs disregard cash grants that refugees receive through the R&P program when conducting an income eligibility determination for RCA. The regulations do not address cash grants from other programs that are not R&P, however.

II. RCA Income Disregards for Cash Grants from a Program Equivalent to R&P

ORR interprets 45 C.F.R. §§ 400.66(d) and 400.59(d) to require states to disregard cash grants that a refugee receives under a program equivalent to R&P, as well as under R&P itself. ORR has determined Welcome Corps to be such an equivalent, as was the APA program; ORR will advise states if/when it identifies other programs as equivalent to R&P. In conducting a refugee's income eligibility determination for RCA, states must disregard cash grants a refugee receives from such a program in the same amount as they would disregard R&P cash grants. ORR limits the amount of cash grants that can be disregarded to the amount of cash grant the client would receive under the R&P program, to maintain equity between refugees being served under different resettlement initiatives.

III. RCA Income Disregards for Cash Grants from a Federal Resettlement Initiative Not Equivalent to R&P

ORR permits and encourages states to disregard cash grants that a refugee receives from a federal resettlement initiative that is not R&P or an R&P equivalent, in the same amount as they would disregard R&P cash grants. If another initiative provides a larger cash grant than the traditional R&P program, the state or PPP may only disregard the amount that the client would receive under traditional R&P, to maintain equity between refugees being served under different resettlement initiatives.

If you have questions about the information contained in this PL, contact ORR's Refugee Policy Unit at RefugeePolicy@acf.hhs.gov.

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