

May 4, 2021

The Honorable Lorena Gonzalez
Chair, Assembly Committee on Appropriations
California State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 1368 (Calderon) Enhanced Service Program for Asylees - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Gonzalez,

NextGen California is pleased to support AB 1368, which would create the Enhanced Services Program for Asylees (ESPA). This program will provide asylum grantees with culturally sensitive case management services for up to 90 days to ensure that asylees have access to the various benefits and services they are eligible to receive. California's network of refugee resettlement agencies would help to administer and operate the program.

Individuals who receive asylum or "asylees," are definitionally distinct from refugees. Asylees are not granted asylum until their arrival in the United States, while refugees receive refuge while still in their home country. Typically, refugees are assigned and make contact with their caseworker before traveling to the United States, asylees do not. As a result of this difference, asylees may not receive help navigating the services available to them nor culturally sensitive information that may help them adjust to life in the United States.

According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), 27,643 individuals were granted asylum in the United States in 2019¹. Of these, 9,336, or 34 percent, were granted by the State of California, making our state the nation's leader in granting asylum². Qualified asylees have access to many of the programs offered by the California Department of Social Services such as: Refugee Cash Assistance, Refugee Employment Services, CalWORKs, CalFresh, and more³. In addition, asylees can also access Medi-Cal and Refugee Medical Assistance.

¹ https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2019/refugee_and_asylee_2019.pdf

² Ibid.

³ https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Refugee/Asylees/CDSS_Asylee_Tri-Fold_Brochure.pdf

Asylees, however, are generally unable to navigate the difficult process of applying for these programs without the assistance of a case manager and frequently are not even aware that they qualify for certain types of assistance. AB 1368 will assure that all asylees have a caseworker to help them access the state services they need.

NextGen California supports programs and policies that help improve the lives of refugees, immigrants, and asylees, who are seeking refuge and protection in California. For these reasons, we ask for your “aye” vote on AB 1368.

Sincerely,



Arnold Sowell Jr.

Executive Director, NextGen California

Cc: Members, Assembly Appropriations Committee