

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 20, 2006

Assistant Secretary Ellen Sauerbrey
Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
US State Department
2200 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20010

Dear Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey,

As the Wat Tham Krabok, Thailand, resettlement process nears completion, we would like to thank you for your office's efforts to keep us well informed, especially following the January 2005 moratorium due to active tuberculosis cases found in this population. It is imperative that our offices continue to work closely with you in relaying important information to the Hmong community and notifying state and local offices regarding this urgent issue. We write you to urge that your office utilize enhanced screening protocols for refugee and asylee populations which are at risk for active tuberculosis.

From 2003-2004, the number of incoming refugees to the U.S. has increased by 59 percent and the number of incoming refugees in 2005 is expected to exceed that in 2004, despite a meager 10 percent increase in fiscal year 2005 funding for refugee resettlement. The jump in the number of refugees arriving in the US, without a subsequent increase in federal aid, already poses a serious financial burden on our states to come up with funding to provide basic, and essential, services for these refugees. We urge you, when requesting appropriations for fiscal year 2007, to ensure that there are adequate funds available for refugee resettlement needs.

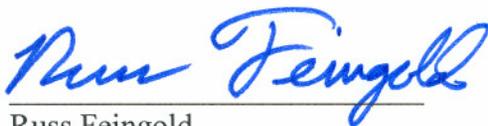
As you also know, refugees and asylees arriving in the United States are experiencing significantly greater health problems than prior populations. When a refugee arrives with medical complications, the tab to treat these refugees is passed on to states and obstacles to effectively and efficiently treat these refugees grow tremendously. The state must then provide capacity to assist these cases and fund outreach, screening, laboratory costs, follow-up, translation and treatment. Treating a multi-drug resistant TB case can result in costs totaling tens of thousands of dollars that states have to pay. Additionally, newly resettled families must cover the costs to finish treatment after their initial 90-day health coverage expires. Completing nine months to a year of medication for thorough treatment of TB can force these families to choose between medication and basic essentials. This situation is unsustainable.

We request that your office implement strict TB screening standards with these concerns in mind.

Specifically, with regard to the enhanced screening protocols to test TB implemented in January, we ask that your office consider ensuring that all high TB risk refugees entering the US receive such procedures. Additionally, it is crucial that refugees are tested just prior (within 3 months) to their arrival in the US. We have also heard from state agencies about the importance of adequate documentation and we ask that you continue your efforts in this regard. In addition, we urge that testing procedures for children in these populations be reevaluated. The Center for Disease Control's quick action and subsequent mandate for chest screening and TB skin tests, and the solid documentation of the Wat refugees who tested positive for TB tremendously helped people back in our states aid these refugees. Adequate capacity and cost effectiveness are imperative for our states, which are working to provide a strong support and service base for these refugees. We hope to prevent further emergency mandates, better equip our states for refugee resettlement, and help new refugees get off to a strong, healthy start in the United States.

We are anxious to hear about how the Department will use lessons learned from the Wat Tham Krabok resettlement process to revise its procedures, and urge continued Department communication with the CDC and the Association of Refugee Health Coordinators in developing and implementing new protocols. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Russ Feingold
United States Senator



Ron Kind
United States Representative



Mark Dayton
United States Senator



Herb Kohl
United States Senator



Norm Coleman
United States Senator