



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
"We are one family under God"

## KNOW YOUR REFUGEE RIGHTS: "BE PREPARED, NOT SCARED"

*This is community **education only**. It is **not legal advice**.  
For questions on your own personal refugee status please consult your resettlement agency, an immigration attorney or an accredited representative.*

### I. Your Rights in the Community

The federal government has granted you refugee status in the United States and that legal status grants you **rights and responsibilities similar to U.S. citizens**.

Some of these rights include:

- You have been admitted into the United States by the U.S. Government and are welcome here.
- You have the freedom to practice any **religion** you choose.
- You have permission to **work** in the United States.
- You and your loved ones have the right to live in a **safe environment**.
  - The police are here to protect you and your family.
  - If your safety is threatened or you are the victim of a crime:
    - ✓ Call 9-1-1 in an emergency. (Interpretation may be available.)
    - ✓ Tell your resettlement agency Case Manager.

Some of your responsibilities in the United States include:

- You must **obey the law**. If you commit a crime, it can affect your legal status.
- You must **pay taxes**. If you receive mail that you do not understand, consult your resettlement agency.

### II. Your Rights If You Encounter U.S. Federal Officials

Sometimes federal law enforcement officials contact members of the community to investigate a crime or a threat to the community, or the legal status of individuals.

**If a Federal Agent comes to your house or apartment, what are you permitted to do?**

- You have the **right to remain silent**.
- You have the **right to not sign any papers that are presented**.
- You have the **right to speak with a lawyer**.
  - If you do not have a lawyer, consult your resettlement agency. They may be able to recommend free or low-cost legal services.
  - You can locate legal services at <https://cliniclegal.org/directory> or <http://www.aialawyer.org/>
- You have the **right to choose not to answer any questions**.
- You can also write down or take pictures of the names and badge numbers of the officers.
- Notify your resettlement agency of the visit, and if needed, to seek guidance.

**If a Federal Agent asks to speak with you, what can you do?**

- Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS) may ask to talk with you.
- You have **the right to decline to be interviewed**, but this can be viewed with suspicion.
- It would be wise to talk to a lawyer or legal representative and/or your resettlement agency.



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**If you agree to an interview, what should you keep in mind?**

- You have the **right to have a lawyer present**. See above for how to find a lawyer.
- You can **choose the time and place for the interview**.
- You can request to **know in advance what questions** will be asked.
- You can **request to have an interpreter present**.
- You do not have to answer all the questions you are asked, if you are not comfortable.
- **REMEMBER: YOU MUST NOT GIVE FALSE INFORMATION** during your interview. It will be considered a criminal offense and may result in negative consequences.

**If you believe that your movements or communications are being monitored, what should you do?**

- Note that local, state, and federal **law enforcement officials can sometimes legally monitor peoples' movements or communications** if they follow proper procedures.
- The specific laws and regulations concerning these procedures vary from state to state.
- You should speak with a lawyer if you believe your movements or communications are being monitored.

**If you use internet and social media, what should you keep in mind?**

- **Be careful about the websites you visit**. Visiting websites that might hold extremist ideologies or having online conversations with others who express radical views could cause you problems in the future.
- Talk to your children and teenagers about what are appropriate sites to visit and what you expect them to avoid. There can often be a difference in how youth and adults use the internet.

**III. Your Rights Regarding International Travel**

**If you are considering travelling internationally, what should you be aware of?**

- Considerations and rules around travel (as they relate to the Travel Ban of Executive Order 13780 put in place in early 2017) are constantly changing. You are advised to consult with a lawyer about your individual situation.
- Green card holders can travel but may be stopped and questioned.
- Now is a **risky period to travel with refugee status** (especially if you are Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, Sudanese, Libyan, Somali, or Yemeni).
- There is the potential for secondary interview or search without a warrant (a judge's authority).
- **Free legal services are available at airports**. Contact [airport@refugeerights.org](mailto:airport@refugeerights.org) for information.

**If you are at an international airport or international border, what are your rights?**

- **Officials at international airports and at ports of entry have the authority to search your luggage and to ask you questions about your citizenship and travel plans**.
- If you are selected for a secondary interview at the airport, **you have the right to ask for a lawyer**. Many lawyers are available free of charge for this purpose.
- If you or someone you know is detained, you should contact: [airport@refugeerights.org](mailto:airport@refugeerights.org) and report this matter to your resettlement agency.
- If you travel, leave a copy of your travel itinerary and travel document with a trusted family member or relative.

**If you have questions about these rights contact your local resettlement or legal service agency, or other reliable refugee or legal service agencies or lawyer.**