



SOUND CITIES ASSOCIATION

38 Cities. A Million People. One Voice.

A statement from Sound Cities Association on the Asylee crisis in Puget Sound.

The members of the Sound Cities Association recognize the positive role that immigrants and those seeking asylum play in fabric of our communities. The multitude of cultures, ideas and perspectives brought by those from other parts of the world make our region, and the cities therein, stronger, more resilient, and adaptable.

Concurrently, if these new members of our community are unable to seek employment, sign lease or loan agreements for housing and transportation, or are otherwise unable to access services for them or their families, neither these individuals nor our cities can map out a positive future in which they can thrive. Several cities in SCA's membership are hosts to growing populations of asylees who are unable to secure the federal immigration paperwork necessary to become a thriving part of our region's community. When organizations have stepped in to provide services and housing, they have chosen to move these populations into cities that are not prepared to meet these needs, with no previous conversations or coordination.

Therefore, the SCA Board of Directors has established the following principles.

Consultation and Coordination

- To ensure the limited resources of our cities and non-profit organizations are best leveraged to address the impact of asylum seekers in King County, the executive leadership of our cities must be consulted at the beginning of any effort to find housing or services for this population in a given city.
 - *Consultation with city executive leadership is critical to ensure that basic services can be provided at certain sites and to ensure that any known public service challenges may be addressed prior to occupancy.*
 - *This outreach would also offer a chance for coordination on non-public services and resources, allowing the asylee's needs to be more adequately met.*

Engagement by the Washington State Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance

- The legislature and the Governor have approved measures to begin addressing many of the issues faced by our cities. Specifically, the Washington State Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance has funding and direction to “coordinate statewide efforts to support the economic and social integration and basic needs of immigrants and refugees arriving and resettling in Washington.”

- *We strongly urge ORIA to provide an update to our cities on the progress they have made on this work, and to follow through with the direction to “coordinate with local, state, and federal government agencies and other stakeholders.”*
- *We ask that ORIA act as the statewide coordinator on services for asylees.*
- *We encourage the governor to include increased funding for ORIA in the proposed 2025-26 biennial budget.*

Federal Leadership

- *At the heart of this issue are the extraordinary wait times for asylum cases in the United States.*
 - *SCA cities urge the Biden Administration, to take whatever executive action possible to shorten the timeline for asylum cases, which would enable our new residents the opportunity to seek work and begin their new life here in earnest.*
 - *Further, we exhort the Washington State Congressional delegation to continue working toward comprehensive immigration reform.*
 - *Finally, please exhaust all efforts to increase funding for asylum casework.*