

SENATE No. 99

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Robyn K. Kennedy

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act creating a special commission to study the current refugee resettlement infrastructure and ensure the successful integration of refugees in Massachusetts.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
<i>Robyn K. Kennedy</i>	<i>First Worcester</i>	
<i>Pavel Payano</i>	<i>First Essex</i>	<i>1/2/2024</i>

SENATE No. 99

By Ms. Kennedy, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 99) of Robyn K. Kennedy for legislation to establish a special commission to study the current refugee resettlement infrastructure and ensure the successful integration of refugees in Massachusetts. Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities.

[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION
SEE HOUSE, NO. 242 OF 2021-2022.]

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court
(2023-2024)

An Act creating a special commission to study the current refugee resettlement infrastructure and ensure the successful integration of refugees in Massachusetts.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 Chapter 6 of the Massachusetts General Laws, as appearing in the 2020 Official Edition,
2 is hereby amended by inserting after Section 208A the following section:-

3 Section 208B:

4 (a) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, there is hereby established
5 a special commission to study and make recommendations concerning the infrastructure of
6 refugee resettlement agencies in the Commonwealth, their breadth of services, where services are
7 lacking, and how the Commonwealth can best work in conjunction with the federal government

to rebuild and support an infrastructure of refugee resettlement agencies that promotes sustainable long-term integration.

(b) The commission shall consist of no less than 19 members: The House and Senate Chairs of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, who shall serve as Co-Chairs, the Executive Director of the Office for Refugees and Immigrants or their designee, the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services or their designee, the Commissioner of the Department of Transitional Assistance or their designee, the Undersecretary of the Department of Housing and Community Development or their designee, the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families or their designee; 1 representative of the International Institute of New England; 1 representative of Ascentria Care Alliance; 1 representative of Jewish Family Service Metrowest; 2 additional representatives of refugee resettlement agencies within the Commonwealth; 1 individual of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, 2 individuals with lived experience as refugees; 1 representative of an employer or labor union that directly employs refugees; 1 representative of a job training program that works directly with refugees; and 2 individuals with expertise in one or more of the following areas: public and affordable housing, federal immigration law and regulation, emergency management, the needs of forcibly displaced individuals.

(c) The commission shall, at a minimum, investigate, collect data and make recommendations on:

(1) the state of the existing reception and placement structure in Massachusetts, including but not limited to: (i) current efforts to resettle refugees, including efforts to assist refugees in obtaining adequate housing, healthcare, education, transfer of professional licensure and

workforce development training; (ii) any failures or gaps in resources that exist in the current system of services for refugees and recently resettled individuals; (iii) where funds should be allocated to strengthen current systems or address gaps in services; (iv) any failures or gaps that exist due to the systematic dismantling of the federal refugee program over the previous 5 years; and (v) how the Commonwealth can support the rebuilding of a strong refugee resettlement structure;

(2) the state of the current integration system in place for refugees in the Commonwealth, including but not limited to: (i) a study of the current integration pipeline and the systems in place to assist refugees from time of arrival through end of services; (ii) identification of gaps that exist in the current system including a study of any potential sudden and often unexpected decrease in public benefits that can occur with a small increase in earnings that exists in the structure as it stands currently; and (iii) public policy and funding structures that the Commonwealth should support to ensure the successful long-term integration of refugees into our society and workforce.

(d) The commission may create committees and working groups to inform the commission's investigation of the topics referenced in SECTION 1(c). The commission, its committees and its working groups may procure services, including consulting services, and otherwise involve experts, stakeholders, and members of the public. The commission shall be supported by staff from the Massachusetts office for refugees and immigrants.

(e) Members of the commission shall be named and the commission shall commence its work within 60 days of the effective date of this act. The commission shall report to the general court and governor the results of its study, together with any draft legislation, regulations or

52 administrative procedure necessary to better serve refugees resettling in the Commonwealth by
53 filing the same with the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives and the director of
54 the office of refugees and immigrants not more than 1 year after the effective date of this act.