United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Catholic Charities USA

Submitted electronically via regulations.gov

November 12, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Re: Removing 30-Day Refugee Termination Notice, Docket No. USCIS-2026-0397

Dear Secretary Mullin:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) appreciate the opportunity to comment on the interim final rule (IFR), *Removing 30-Day Refugee Termination Notice*, published by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The USCCB and CCUSA are concerned that the IFR, which became effective when it was published in the *Federal Register* on October 14, 2026, will reduce due process and inflict unnecessary hardship on families.

The USCCB is a nonprofit corporation whose members are the active Catholic bishops of the United States, representing nearly 200 autonomous dioceses in all 50 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The USCCB advocates according to, and promotes the pastoral teachings of, the U.S. Catholic bishops in diverse areas of the nation's life. For many years leading up to 2025, the USCCB partnered directly with the U.S. government to administer programs that provided aid to refugees and other vulnerable populations authorized for assistance. While the USCCB no longer administers these programs, such ministries remain integral to the life of the Catholic Church in the United States.

CCUSA is a national membership organization representing 170 independent Catholic Charities agencies. Together, these agencies comprise one of the largest charitable networks in the country: Catholic Charities agencies operate more than 3,500 service locations across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories, providing a wide variety of critical services, including food and nutrition support, pregnancy support services, emergency rental and utility assistance, rapid housing support, and housing counseling. Last year alone, this diverse network of programs reached more than 16 million people.

Through a nationwide network of local Catholic Charities agencies, CCUSA also provides specialized resettlement and integration services to refugees and other eligible newcomers as they rebuild their lives in communities across the United States. CCUSA works in partnership with local Catholic Charities agencies that in turn have partnerships with state and local governments, healthcare providers, schools, workforce development organizations, landlords, faith communities, and other community partners to help individuals and families achieve long-term stability and self-

sufficiency. These services, which are federally and privately funded, provide a coordinated continuum of support, from initial arrival through long-term integration.

In Chapter 25 of the Gospel according to Matthew, Christ calls us to witness to the poor with compassion and through acts of service and generosity. His teachings remind us that whatever we do for the least among us, we do for Christ.[1] We answer this call through corporal acts of mercy and advocacy. Assisting refugees is compelled by the belief that every person is created in God's image and imbued by Him with an inherent dignity. These ministries embody the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable found in Catholic social teaching.

Consistent with these beliefs, Catholic communities across our country have collaborated with federal agencies for decades to resettle refugees admitted by the government. This longstanding collaboration has provided individuals and families with the safety and stability necessary to rebuild their lives, integrate successfully, and contribute meaningfully to their new communities.

Based on this experience, the USCCB and CCUSA are concerned that the IFR's core proposal may jeopardize that stability and safety for both principal and derivative refugees and their family members. Inquiries into already granted refugee status should be conducted with due care and consideration of supplemental information, particularly after these individuals have completed rigorous pre-admission vetting.

Decisions to terminate a person's refugee status demand exceptional care because they can have lasting and potentially devastating consequences for the safety and well-being of individuals and their families. As stated in the supplementary information, about 186,000 refugees could be subject to the IFR.[2] Given the unprecedented number of individuals whose claims for protection could be retroactively denied, we urge USCIS to fully consider the serious practical and logistical barriers that would arise if the Notice of Intent to Terminate (NOIT) response period is shortened from 30 days down to just 10 days. In our view, the anticipated adverse impacts significantly outweigh USCIS' stated justifications and admittedly unquantifiable hoped-for benefits.[3]

We therefore respectfully urge USCIS to reconsider and withdraw the IFR and retain the previous 30-day notice period. Providing respondents with adequate time to respond to a NOIT is essential to ensuring fairness in proceedings that may have profound and lasting consequences.

[1] "'The Church's love for the poor… is a part of her constant tradition.' This love is inspired by the Gospel of the Beatitudes, of the poverty of Jesus, and of his concern for the poor… 'Those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation.'" Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 2444, 2448 (quoting *Centesimus annus*, no. 57, and *Libertatis conscientia*, no. 68).
[2] Removing 30-Day Refugee Termination Notice, 91 FR 65077, 65088 (October 14, 2026) (to be codified at 8 C.F.R. Part 207).
[3] *Id*. at 65089.

I. USCIS Should Retain the 30-Day Response Period to Protect Due Process, Fairness, and Family Well-being

The 10-day notice period ignores the practical barriers to submitting a complete written or oral rebuttal, including mail delays, limited English proficiency, and the time needed to gather records and secure legal help.[4] As such, it denies refugees a meaningful opportunity to defend their status. Additionally, the IFR falsely assumes that the shortened response timeframe will have no impact on family well-being, but that conclusion suggests DHS ignored several factors.

Many refugees already face significant mail delays that interfere with their ability to respond to government notices in a timely manner. For example, one Catholic Charities agency reported that a recently resettled family was required to collect its mail from the local post office for two months while awaiting a new mailbox key from the U.S. Postal Service. With limited transportation and competing work and family obligations, regularly traveling to a post office imposed a substantial burden on the family. Under a 10-day response period, even a brief delay in mail delivery or access to a post office box could entirely deprive an individual of a meaningful opportunity to respond before the deadline.

Language access presents an additional barrier. English learners may need time to obtain translation or interpretation services simply to understand the allegations, evidence, and instructions contained in the NOIT. Individuals may also need to gather records, conduct research, and secure qualified legal assistance to navigate this profoundly consequential process. Each step requires time and financial resources and may be especially difficult for people with limited English proficiency.

Additionally, we are concerned that DHS has not fully considered the impact of the shortened response timeframe on families. DHS claims to have reviewed the proposal in accordance with section 654 of the Treasury General Appropriations Act. Specifically, the IFR states "that the implementation of this regulation will not negatively affect family well-being and will not have any impact on the autonomy and integrity of the family as an institution."[5] This is wrong on its face.

As Catholics, we take the primacy of the family within society seriously, as well as the integral role strong, healthy families play in promoting national prosperity. DHS notes that section 654 of the Treasury General Appropriations Act lays out seven considerations related to the family that agencies should consider as part of regulatory proposals. Of those seven, two are particularly relevant here: (1) whether the regulatory proposal affects disposable income or poverty of families and children; and (2) whether financial impacts on families caused by the proposal are justified. DHS entirely ignores

[4] We note that the supplementary information states that "[a]n alien does not need to submit evidence or a full response within the 10 days, and may instead opt for an interview, but must make the interview request to USCIS within the response period." While the language of the rule states that "[t]he alien will have 10 days from the date notice is served upon him or her in accordance with 8 CFR 103.8 to present written or oral evidence to show why the alien's refugee status should not be terminated." This is a troubling disparity and can have significant consequences. Removing 30-Day Refugee Termination Notice, 91 FR 65077, 65085 and 65091 (October 14, 2026) (to be codified at 8 C.F.R. Part 207).
[5] Id. at 65090.

the potential impact on family well-being caused by those with refugee status losing that status and, in turn, having their associated employment authorization terminated. Not only would this impact families comprised entirely of individuals with refugee status but it would also have an adverse impact on mixed-status families, which can include a U.S.-citizen spouse and/or U.S.-citizen child(ren) who are dependent on the income of those with refugee-based employment authorization. We are especially concerned about situations involving parents with U.S.-born children, with this country being the only home they've ever known. Through the Catholic Church's ministries to serve families in need, we know these situations are not uncommon.

Similarly, DHS' discussion of reliance interests is, at best, incomplete. In just a handful of sentences, the IFR dismisses every negative impact that would befall those whose status is terminated, all in the name of expediency. In the case of employment authorization, the agency simply states: "This IFR does not remove the ability of aliens who legitimately qualify for refugee status to obtain employment authorization, permanent residency, and any other available benefits." But it makes no mention of the fact that individuals would lose their status, employment authorization, and all accompanying benefits with just 10 days' notice (and arguably less than that, given the factors described above), potentially leaving families without any ability to support themselves, causing spouses, parents, and children to wonder whether they will be separated, and increasing pressures on local communities, including faith-based service providers. As DHS acknowledges, if an agency determines a regulation *may* negatively affect family well-being, then it must provide an adequate rationale for its implementation. If these do not constitute very real impacts on family well-being, what would DHS define as a potentially negative effect?

It is also worth noting the likelihood of this IFR being a violation of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). In particular, "[l]ongstanding polices may have 'engendered serious reliance interests that must be taken into account.'" [6]As DHS itself admits, "The former Immigration and Naturalization Service first implemented regulations governing the termination of refugee status following the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, and the process has remained substantively unchanged in the 45 years since then." Especially since it has been carried out in the form of an IFR, the present change is faced with significant scrutiny under the relevant caselaw with respect to the "good cause" requirement of the APA.[7]

Ultimately, we recognize DHS may continue to assert that its stated rationales for the IFR outweigh these interests, but it should never have promulgated the IFR without first giving them proper consideration. Throughout the IFR, DHS seems to treat the termination of refugee status as a forgone conclusion, with the opportunity to present evidence contesting the termination viewed as a mere

[6] *See Encino Motorcars, LLC, v. Navarro*, 579 U.S. 211, 222 (2016) (citation omitted) ("it follows that an 'unexplained inconsistency' in agency policy is a reason for holding an interpretation to be an arbitrary and capricious change from agency practice").
[7] *See, e.g.*, *United States v. Reynolds*, 710 F.3d 498, 509–14 (3d Cir. 2013) (holding that general concerns regarding public safety or a desire to eliminate uncertainty do not constitute "good cause"); *Mack Trucks, Inc. v. EPA*, 682 F.3d 87 (D.C. Cir. 2012) (vacating an Environmental Protection Agency interim final rule because the EPA improperly invoked the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) "good cause" exception).

formality, rather than a meaningful opportunity to rebut life-altering action by the government. This approach does not reflect the principles of due process and fairness that have long embodied the American conceptions of law and justice. Especially given the lack of a formal appeal process or the ability of the government to reverse its erroneous termination of an individual's refugee status, the potential for even one status termination to be rebutted through supplemental evidence should loom largely among DHS' considerations. This is particularly true when refugees constitute such a vulnerable population of people, with many having already endured tremendous hardship.

II. This IFR Risks Increasing USCIS' Operational Challenges

USCIS has faced significant operational challenges in recent years, resulting in substantial backlogs across multiple processing centers and benefit categories. Implementing this IFR would likely impose additional administrative and operational burdens on an agency whose resources are already strained, without addressing the problems with the refugee approval process identified in the IFR that purportedly resulted in allowing inadmissible people into the country. The reduced timeframe for responding to a NOIT, combined with the anticipated volume and complexity of responses, risks creating yet another backlog and diverting personnel from the timely adjudication of other immigration benefits.

These potential operational constraints also raise serious concerns about transparency, accuracy, and procedural fairness. Meaningful review of a refugee's status may require consideration of extensive records, evidence from abroad, interpretation services, and information concerning conditions in the individual's home country. Rushed proceedings increase the likelihood of inconsistent adjudications and erroneous terminations.

Additionally, the IFR could also impose a severe emotional and psychological burden on individuals who have already endured years of uncertainty and trauma. Refugees often spend prolonged periods in refugee camps or other precarious circumstances while undergoing extensive screening and waiting for their claims to be adjudicated and approved. After admission to the United States, they begin rebuilding their lives in reliance on that determination and establish ties within their communities. Subjecting them to renewed review without clear timelines or adequate procedural safeguards would destabilize families and revive the fear, anxiety, and uncertainty they experienced before resettlement.

The IFR offers limited insight into how USCIS will adjudicate NOIT responses. We are concerned that USCIS did not fully assess its operational capacity, resource requirements, and the potential effects of implementing this IFR on existing processing times. We reiterate that the need for expedited terminations should not outweigh the human consequences of such terminations, especially those involving families and children.

III. The 10-Day Response Period Imposes an Unreasonable Burden on Service Providers

At a minimum, USCIS should have given refugees and the organizations that serve them a reasonable opportunity to adjust to the new process before it took effect. Refugees often depend on charitable

organizations for legal assistance, housing, healthcare, language access, and other essential services during resettlement and integration. This fact has been demonstrated time and time again by the government's own dependence on these community-based service providers to supplement publicly funded services and programs. Many of these organizations have faced increased capacity issues in serving their community. Requiring a response to a NOIT within only 10 days places yet another burden on this strained sector, which ultimately harms the refugees who rely on their support, as well as others seeking assistance from a finite supply of resources.

Geographic barriers compound the problem. For example, one Catholic Charities agency reported that its office is 90 miles from the nearest USCIS office and 160 miles from the nearest immigration legal services provider. Getting clients to their interview or to obtain legal assistance will be a challenge. The 10-day response timeframe exacerbates this problem. An organization serving hundreds of refugee clients would not know where to begin to help each client prepare and submit a timely NOIT response. If USCIS requires an in-person interview for even 50 clients, transporting them over these distances would be particularly burdensome, especially for clients with disabilities or families with small children.

The 10-day deadline also does not account for the time needed to provide meaningful assistance. Service providers may need to help clients obtain evidence from abroad, secure certified English translations of foreign-language documents, coordinate with legal representatives, and prepare clients for their interview with USCIS. Completing these steps within 10 days is impracticable, particularly for organizations managing large caseloads with limited resources.

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We urge USCIS to reconsider this IFR and request a superseding final version that reverses course, granting individuals, at a minimum, a 30-day notice period in which to present evidence. While we understand the agency's need to protect the integrity of the refugee admissions process, we urge USCIS to exercise particular care and consideration in implementing such a rule, prioritizing fairness, transparency, and consideration for families.

Respectfully submitted,

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