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[00:00:16] **Speaker 1** A President Trump executive order late last month suspended refugee admissions to the US and resettlement funds. Last year, more than 1800 refugees from all over the world settled in Wisconsin. The Christian humanitarian nonprofit refugee resettlement agency World Relief operates in the Fox Valley and Chippewa Valley in Wisconsin. We turn to Matthew Sorenson, vice president of advocacy and policy at World Relief. For more on this situation. And thanks very much for being here.

[00:00:51] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I'm so glad I can be with you.

[00:00:53] **Speaker 1** So we understand that refugees ready to travel to the US had their flights canceled when this executive order came came down. Was your agency in Wisconsin expecting people on those flights or flights in subsequent days?

[00:01:08] **Speaker 2** Yeah. I mean, we had travel that was that was confirmed. Of course, we were aware that the president might do something similar to what President Trump did back in 2017. So I think we were aware of this being a possibility of suspending refugee resettlement. And in cases where it was family reunification, where we've got somebody in Wisconsin who was waiting to be united to a loved one, you know, I think we would have at least shared that We're concerned that this could be a possibility, but that doesn't do anything to change the devastation when a family that in some cases might have been waiting for a decade apart, often with their loved ones stuck in a refugee camp overseas, and that travel had to be canceled. And we are hopeful and prayerful that the president will resume refugee resettlement after the initial 90 day suspension of resettlement that was announced on his first day in office.

[00:01:56] **Speaker 1** Because where does the suspension of the program leave those people cleared to come here and those hoping to?

[00:02:03] **Speaker 2** Yeah, it's it leaves them with a lot of uncertainty. And I mean, frankly, refugees live in some of the most vulnerable situations in the world, often in camp settings, often in a second country where they're being allowed to reside, but not to work lawfully and unable to provide for themselves. So that opportunity for resettlement to rebuild their lives in a state like Wisconsin while also contributing to the economy and meeting key labor needs is an incredible opportunity. And we're just really devastated. And this includes people who are allies of the U.S. military from Afghanistan who are at risk because of their service to the United States mission in Afghanistan and includes persecuted Christians and other religious minorities who are were persecuted for their faith in their country of origin and were desperate for that religious liberty that we offer here in the United States. So it is really devastating. And again, we're really hoping and praying. You know, President Trump has said that he values legal immigration. He has talked as recently as in the last few days about wanting to defend persecuted Christians. The refugee resettlement program is an important way to be able to to do both those things.

[00:03:02] **Speaker 1** Have you had any outreach from the Trump administration or have you reached out to them on this?

[00:03:08] **Speaker 2** We have. You know, we actually even before inauguration, we helped mobilize a Christian statement on refugee resettlement. And we are an evangelical Christian organization. So we've had more than 11,000 Christians around the country signed on to a statement. Again, many of these are people who voted for President Trump. This isn't about Republicans or Democrats, but on this question of refugee resettlement, this unequivocally illegal form of immigration that helps people who have fled persecution. There's really broad bipartisan support. But I would say, you know, we've communicated that to the White House. They actually the communication that we've received, post-inauguration has been discouraging because we were actually told on January 24th, a few days after inauguration, that not only was refugee resettlement being suspended going forward for at least 90 days, which we had opposed, but maybe anticipated might be a possibility. But then we got word on the 24th of January that we should stop all work to provide support for refugees who had already been resettled in the previous 90 days in places like Appleton and Eau Claire and Oshkosh. And that has put us in a really challenging situation because, you know, we've committed to provide housing for those refugees in Wisconsin. It's about 175 people. And that's, of course, a lot of resources that we had expected the federal government to follow through on their commitment for. And now we're working with churches and other individual donors to meet that very significant gap.

[00:04:25] **Speaker 1** I understand that is about 175 refugees newly here that you were hoping to provide these services for. And how much in lost funding does that represent for you?

[00:04:38] **Speaker 2** You know, I don't know this specific figure for Wisconsin. At the national level, it's we estimate it's somewhere around $8 million that we're needing to raise very quickly. That's not actually all the costs, but to cover the most basic expenses for the roughly 4000 people that we've resettled around the country. And about 175 of those are there in Wisconsin. And that, again, the biggest cost there is rent. You can do the math on covering rent for 475 people for three months, which is what the federal government committed to these people before they arrived. And what we committed to them as well. And we're doing our very best to keep that commitment we don't want to see anyone with. Housing. And we want them to be able to be economically self-sufficient on month four and have a job and be able to cover their own expenses. That's how this system usually works. But when the government kind of pulls out of the public part of that public private partnership, we're relying very heavily on churches and individual donors to help fill in those gaps.

[00:05:32] **Speaker 1** All right. We need to leave it there. Matthew Chance, thanks very much. And thanks for your work.

[00:05:38] **Speaker 2** Thank you.

[00:05:39] **Speaker 1** For more on this and other issues facing Wisconsin, visit our Web site at PBS's wisconsin.org and then click on the news tab. That's our program for tonight. I'm Fredericka Freiberg. Have a good weekend. And I'm sorry for the plight that you and your organization find yourselves in. But thank you. I think it really shows.