



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 **talk 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 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**.
- 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.**