



STATES LAY THE **FOUNDATION**

STABILIZATION & RESILIENCE

A policy roadmap to integrate and welcome
refugees and immigrants

August 28, 2026

9:30-10:30am PDT / 12:30-1:30pm EDT



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ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE (IRC)

The IRC responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and regain control of their future. Join the thousands of IRC supporters who have called their representatives, written letters, shared our campaigns or otherwise mobilized to advocate for change in their communities and worldwide.

[Rescue.org/states-lay-foundation](https://rescue.org/states-lay-foundation)

2026 SUMMIT

STATES LAY THE FOUNDATION: STABILIZATION & RESILIENCE

For generations, the International Rescue Committee and our community of supporters have stood with refugees during times of international crisis and humanitarian need. This commitment has supported millions of refugees who arrived in the U.S. and demonstrated resolve to start a new future for themselves and their families here in our communities. These new neighbors have shown resilience in crisis, recovered from unimaginable storms, and rebuilt their lives against all odds.

In this moment, they face a new chapter of uncertainty. The federal government is reshaping the decades-long traditions of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program, and the landscape of refugee integration is shifting beneath our feet. As federal funding structures change, states and local partners are being called upon more than ever to sustain the critical services that help refugees and immigrants find stability.

We must ask: What would we lose if states didn't rise to carry this work forward—if they didn't find new ways to keep their newest neighbors housed, fed, and on a path toward self-sufficiency? Across the country, states and local partners are answering that question with innovation—identifying new funding streams, building creative program approaches, and confronting urgent challenges like food security head-on. Even as resources grow more uncertain, communities are proving that resolve and creativity can sustain what matters most.

In this year's States Lay the Foundation summit, framed by the theme of **Stabilization and Resilience**, we will highlight the opportunities before us to strengthen integration systems through diversified funding and bipartisan collaboration. State legislators, advocates, and local partners will come together to demonstrate how creative, cost-effective strategies can sustain critical services for refugees and immigrants even amid shifting federal support.

This year we call on the public to help build that stability once again. During this virtual summit, presenters and panelists will engage in forward-looking discussions on the future of advocacy and how this pivotal moment can be leveraged to drive lasting change in local systems. Together, we will work to equip stakeholders with actionable insights to build integration frameworks that are more sustainable, more responsive, and more resilient.

Today we find ourselves at a critical crossroads. It is time—more than ever—to rise with courage and determination alongside refugees and new Americans, building the stability and resilience their futures depend on. Join us.

AGENDA

12:30 PM EDT

Opening Video

12:35 PM EDT

Opening Remarks by **Dr. Omar Aziz**, Deputy Director of Programs, International Rescue Committee (IRC)

12:40 PM EDT

STATE LEGISLATOR PANEL

- ▶ **Emily Shetty**, Maryland State House Delegate
- ▶ **Flavio Bravo**, Arizona State Senator
- ▶ **Jon Dunwell**, Iowa State Representative
- ▶ Moderator: **Austyn Smith**, Senior Advocacy Advisor, IRC

1:05 PM EDT

LOCAL LEADERS PANEL

- ▶ **Amanda Bergson-Shilcock**, Senior Fellow, National Skills Coalition
- ▶ **Ben Reno Weber**, Louisville Metro Area Council Member
- ▶ Moderator: **Austyn Smith**, Senior Advocacy Advisor, IRC

1:25 PM EDT

Closing Remarks by **Kristy Gladfelter**, Vice President and Head of Learning & Impact, International Rescue Committee (IRC)

SPEAKERS & MODERATORS

PRESENTER & SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)



NEJRA SUMIC

Nejra Sumic is a former refugee who was forced to flee from her home country of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nejra and her family

were granted asylum as refugees in the United States.

She received her Master's in Public Administration at Western International University and is fluent in three languages.

Nejra brings in over a decade of experience in the human rights sector, including in the field of advocacy and policy. In her current role, she is the US State Advocacy Director for the International Rescue Committee. She currently serves as an advisor to the United States Refugee Advisory Board and is also the Arizona Delegate for Refugee Congress. Through her work, she co-authored the book "Divine Love", where she writes about her journey as a refugee child. She is most passionate about human rights issues and working with the refugee community.



DR. OMAR AZIZ

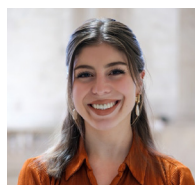
Dr. Omar Aziz, BDS, is Deputy Director of Programs at the International Rescue Committee in Atlanta and a leader in community

health and resettlement services. He created the Home Health Visit Program for newcomers, recognized by NRC-RIM as a promising practice for culturally tailored, linguistically accessible outreach, and led a collaborative mental health initiative with Georgia State University and Mercer University that expanded trauma-informed care for marginalized communities.

In recognition of this work, Dr. Aziz was named a **2025 ABCT Champion of Evidence-Based Psychological**

Interventions — one of the nation's highest honors for advancing community-centered mental health, awarded to innovators expanding access to care for communities often overlooked by traditional behavioral health systems.

Through collaborative, empathetic leadership, Dr. Aziz has built teams and programs that address both immediate needs and long-term community resilience — reflecting his belief in the power of compassion and advocacy to create lasting impact.



AUSTYN SMITH

Austyn Smith currently serves as the IRC's U.S. Senior Advocacy Advisor, where she partners with state and local elected leaders to

advance policies that foster welcoming communities and support the successful integration of refugees and other newcomers across the United States. Prior to joining the IRC, Austyn served as a Legislative Aide to U.S. Senator Patty Murray of Washington during the Congresswoman's time as President Pro Tempore of the U.S. Senate, Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Chair of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. In that role, she advised on a broad portfolio of issues, including immigration and foreign policy. Austyn's career spans public policy, advocacy, research, and academia. Her experience further includes work with think tanks, environmental organizations, and international development initiatives. She also worked with a non-profit on the ground in Vietnam that partnered with local villages and communities to advance their own visions for sustainable development through asset-based community development approaches. As the daughter of Mexican immigrants, Austyn brings both personal and professional perspectives to her work. Her family's

experience helped inspire a lifelong commitment to advancing opportunities for refugees, immigrants, and other displaced populations through effective advocacy and public engagement. Austyn holds a Master of Arts in International Affairs from The George Washington University, with concentrations in conflict resolution and international development. She earned bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Spanish, along with a minor in German, from Western Washington University.



MARYLAND HOUSE DELEGATE **EMILY SHETTY**

Elected in 2018, Emily is a progressive Democratic member of the Maryland House of Delegates,

with a strong professional background in public policy and advocacy. She spends her days fighting for patients to get access to needed healthcare, and to help lower the cost of prescription drugs, and her nights organizing neighbors and friends to advocate for policies that impact them at the local, state and federal levels. She is also a mother who believes that every child deserves access to a high-quality education, starting from pre-school. She has passed 19 bills into law since being elected to represent District 18 in the House of Delegates, serves on the House Appropriations Committee as the Chair of the Health and Social Services Subcommittee and a member of the Capital Budget subcommittee, and was nominated by the Speaker and elected by her peers to serve as the Chair of the House Democratic Caucus.

Emily Shetty was born in Fairfax, VA to immigrant parents, and was raised by a single mother who was a small business owner. With the inspiration and encouragement of her mother, Emily began serving her community at age nine and received the local United Way's "Community Hero" award years later in 2001, in recognition for her service to numerous local charities including Big Brothers, Big Sisters; the Arc of High Point (NC); the local public library; Habitat for Humanity; and several others.

With a law degree from Catholic University's Columbus School of Law, Emily has continued

serving her community in her professional life as well. She spent several years as Legislative Director to a progressive Democratic Member of Congress, Representative Ed Towns (D-NY), for whom she managed much of his domestic policy portfolio. Emily received the Every Life Foundation Rare Voice award for her work in paving the way for new therapies for rare disease patients.

Emily then served as Senior Director of Federal Legislative Affairs for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, where she advocated for cancer patients before Members of Congress and their staff. In that capacity, she engaged grassroots cancer patients and their families, training them on how to lobby Members of Congress to pass critical legislation that increased funding at NIH for pediatric cancer research, and lower the patient out-of-pocket costs for lifesaving medication.

Emily and her husband Ash, a recently naturalized citizen, live in Kensington with their elementary-aged son Ayden, who attends Montgomery County Public Schools.



ARIZONA STATE SENATOR **FLAVIO BRAVO**

Senator Flavio Bravo was elected to the Arizona State Legislature in November 2022 and represents

the 26th legislative district that includes Phoenix and Glendale within Maricopa County.

A fifth-generation Arizonan, born and raised in the 26th district, Flavio has worked continuously to serve his community as an educator, leader, and an advocate for causes advancing the quality of life in his community. He currently serves on the Board of Directors for Central Arizona Shelter Services, Open Hearts Family Wellness, and the Kino Border Initiative. Prior to the State Senate, Flavio served in the State House and sat on the Government and Regulatory Affairs Committees.

For Flavio, education has always been a priority. A proud first-generation college graduate, Flavio received a Bachelor's degree from Loyola University Chicago in Political Science & Philosophy.

After receiving his Master's degree in Migration Studies from the University of San Francisco, Flavio served as a Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) Graduate Fellow in Washington, D.C. In this role, Flavio focused on housing and economic policy for Arizona's seventh congressional district.

Flavio is an alumni of Valle del Sol's Hispanic Leadership Institute and was recognized as a 30 Under 30 Alumni from the University of San Francisco in 2021. Flavio also works as the Program Director for Cavco Industries, Inc.'s Homes for Our Own program where he helps first-time homebuyers navigate the homebuying process.



**IOWA STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JON DUNWELL**

Jon Dunwell is serving his third term in the Iowa House of Representatives, where he represents District 38 in Jasper County and serves as an Assistant Majority Leader.

Throughout his career, Jon has centered his work on service, leadership, and community engagement. In addition to his legislative service, he is director of outreach and engagement at The Family Leader and pastor of Gateway Church Monroe. His professional and civic experience spans ministry, nonprofit leadership, public safety, and community development, including service as senior chaplain for the Orange County Sheriff's Office, board chair of Meals on Wheels/Seniors First and the YMCA, and vice president of the Pine Hills Community Council.

He studied at Bethany Global University in Bloomington, Minnesota, and Crown College in Minneapolis.

Born in St. Cloud and raised in Shakopee, Minnesota, Jon now calls Newton, Iowa, home, where he lives with his wife, Christine. They have two sons.



**AMANDA
BERGSON-SHILCOCK**

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock is a Senior Fellow at National Skills Coalition where she leads the organization's work on adult education and workforce policies to expand opportunities for U.S.-born and immigrant adults. Throughout her career, Amanda has worked with state and federal policymakers and skills advocates to develop policy solutions that address the challenges facing adult learners and jobseekers, including immigrant workers.

As a workforce development expert for more than a decade, Amanda has authored numerous publications and policy recommendations – on immigrant integration, workforce development, and adult education – which have helped educate policymakers, journalists, and the public, and inform public policy at the state and federal levels. Her policy expertise, insights, and commentary have been cited and published in local and national media outlets, including *TIME*, *Fortune*, *BBC News*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *POLITICO*, *Business Insider*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *HR Dive*, and many others.

Prior to joining National Skills Coalition in 2015, Amanda served as Vice President of Policy and Evaluation at the nonprofit Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians in Philadelphia. In that role, she led the Welcoming Center's policy and communications work on adult education, workforce and economic development issues. She also served as Policy and Communications Director for IMPRINT, a national coalition of nonprofit organizations focusing on the integration of immigrant professionals.

Amanda holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied American Civilization with an emphasis on minority populations. She is based in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C.



LOUISVILLE COUNCILMAN
BEN RENO WEBER

Ben Reno-Weber was appointed to Metro Council in March 2023 and elected to serve in November 2023, and re-elected in 2024.

In 2026, he serves as Chair of the Labor & Economic Development Committee. He is also a member of the Budget and Public Works Committees.

A Louisville native, Ben started his career as a social entrepreneur with the World Bank's global microfinance unit, focused on creating greater access to capital among marginalized communities, particularly in the Balkans and former Soviet Union. He earned an MBA and MPA from Harvard's Business and Kennedy School and joined the Boston Consulting Group in 2009, where he focused on corporate culture and change management.

On his return to Kentucky, he ran a series of organizations at the intersection of business and social impact, including a tech start up, several non-profits, a consulting firm focused on company culture, and foundation-funded think tank. As Director of the Microsoft-funded Future of Work Initiative, he worked to diversify the tech talent pipeline in the data-economy workforce, with a particular focus on connecting resources that support marginalized community members to obtain "future-proof" jobs in technology and AI-related fields. In that capacity, he has worked closely with "niche" industries to help industry leaders strategize about how automation and AI could be a force for good (and not evil).

As Deputy Director of the Health Equity Innovation Hub at the University of Louisville, Ben focused on making the regional innovation ecosystem more open, transparent, and equitable. The "Innovation Engine" model deployed more than a million dollars in pilot funding to innovators whose lived experiences give them unique insight into the most pressing issues in health.

Now, Ben serves as the CEO of Essential Innovations, a tech company he founded focused on helping find, deploy, connect, and build technologies that reduce the barriers to work and wellbeing.

In 2024, his wife Theresa and three children finally acknowledged that his mastery of dad jokes has become apparent.



KRISTY GLADFELTER

Kristy Gladfelter is the Vice President of Learning and Impact at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), with more than

30 years of experience in the humanitarian sector spanning education, learning, technical assistance, program strategy, and organizational improvement. She is a member of the executive leadership team for the IRC's Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration department, which operates programs across the United States and Europe.

In her current role, Kristy leads the IRC's Learning and Impact team, overseeing technical assistance in resettlement, economic empowerment, asylum and legal services, safety, health and education, safeguarding, research, measurement, and program technology. Her team strengthens service quality, builds the capacity of staff and partners, supports evidence-informed decision-making, and advances continuous learning and improvement.

Throughout her career at the IRC, Kristy has led learning, technical assistance, and systems-strengthening initiatives across the United States, Latin America, and Europe. Before joining the IRC, she worked internationally as a teacher trainer in Guinea-Bissau and as a teacher in Spain.

Kristy holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Indiana University and a Master of Arts in Education from San Diego State University.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND LICENSING

Refugees and immigrants bring skills, experience, and professional training that can strengthen state workforces, yet licensing requirements can prevent qualified professionals from putting their expertise to work. By creating pathways that recognize international training while maintaining professional standards, states can address workforce shortages, expand economic opportunity, and make better use of talent already in their communities.

WEST VIRGINIA

H.B. 5458

(Enacted; effective June 7, 2026), Relating to professionals to be licensed by the West Virginia Board of Medicine.

Allows qualifying internationally trained physicians to obtain full medical licensure without completing the standard two years of U.S. residency, provided they meet specified training, credentialing, examination, employment, and sponsorship requirements.

COLORADO

H.B. 26-1431

(Enacted; effective August 12, 2026), Competency for Occupational Licensure Portability.

Expands Colorado's occupational credential portability pathway to qualifying professionals licensed, certified, or registered in another country, allowing international credentials and demonstrated competency to support state licensure across regulated professions.

ACCESS TO FOOD

Reliable access to food is fundamental to stability, health, and self-sufficiency. As changes to federal eligibility leave some refugees, asylees, and other lawfully present immigrants without access to federal nutrition assistance, states can help prevent food insecurity by establishing targeted programs and investments that preserve access to essential support.

MARYLAND

H.B. 1458

(Introduced February 13, 2026), State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Refugees and Asylees – Establishment.

Would create a state-funded food assistance program for refugees, asylees, and certain humanitarian populations who lost federal SNAP eligibility following the 2025 federal eligibility changes.

WASHINGTON

S.B. 5998

(Enacted; effective April 1, 2026), 2025–2027 supplemental operating appropriations.

Provides \$46.625 million in additional state funding in each fiscal year to implement Washington's Emergency Food Assistance Program.

- ▶ FY26: \$46,625,000
- ▶ FY27: \$46,625,000

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Access to affordable healthcare is essential to individual well-being, family stability, and thriving communities. States can reduce gaps in coverage by expanding pathways to care for residents who face eligibility barriers because of immigration status, while designing policies that are responsive to both community needs and state fiscal capacity.

CALIFORNIA

S.B. 1422

(Introduced February 20, 2026), Medi-Cal: eligibility: immigration status.

Would create a fiscal pathway to restore full-scope Medi-Cal coverage for adults currently limited to emergency and pregnancy-related care because of immigration status, contingent on the state determining that expansion would not create a General Fund deficit.

NEW YORK

S. 9589

(Introduced March 26, 2026), Coverage for New Yorkers Losing Insurance Due to the Implementation of H.R. 1.

Would authorize state-funded health coverage and premium assistance for New Yorkers losing federally supported coverage under H.R. 1, including lawfully present immigrants made ineligible for federal assistance.

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INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

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