



NEWS from the Shelby County Mayor's Office

Lee Harris, Mayor

Vasco A. Smith, Jr., Administration Building
11th Floor, 160 North Main, Memphis, Tennessee 38103

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**SHELBY COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO ANNOUNCE SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN OF
REFUGEES AMID INSTABILITY ABROAD AND MIGRATION WAVE**

The partnership with Refugee Empowerment Program will mark the first time the long-running program for children of refugees and immigrants will receive local government support.

- WHAT:** Celebration of partnership to expand afterschool programming for children of refugees and immigrants
- WHEN:** 3:45 p.m., Thursday, May 18, 2023
- WHO:** Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris, Shelby County Commissioner Henri E. Brooks, Shelby County Commissioner Erika Sugarmon, Refugee Empowerment Program Executive Director Camela Echols, and youth participants in after-school program
- WHERE:** Refugee Empowerment Program, 258 N. Merton St., Memphis, TN 38112

Shelby County, TN – Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris and Commissioner Henri Brooks will announce a new partnership and grant to the Refugee Empowerment Program (REP) to provide after-school programming, tutoring, and necessary transportation for over 120 children of refugees and immigrants in Memphis. Just last week, a controversial pandemic-era border policy, known as Title 42, ended. The end of Title 42 means that the federal government is expecting an influx of migrants crossing the US-Mexico border. This comes at a time of increased instability and conflict in countries such as Sudan, Ukraine, Cuba, and Venezuela.

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Shelby County Government's support is part of the county's ongoing commitment to supporting local organizations that help make Shelby County a more welcoming and inclusive place for those fleeing their home country for a better life. The funds have allowed REP to serve hundreds of students and provide free transportation to and from the after-school program for elementary, middle, and high school students.

Over the past several years, the Harris Administration has made efforts to help refugee families resettle and receive the support they need as they begin new lives in Shelby County. The partnership with Refugee Empowerment Program follows Shelby County's successful partnership with World Relief and Welcome South in 2021 to welcome Afghan refugees to the area, efforts to expand access to vital county services for those facing language barriers, and a public awareness campaign led by the Mayor's Office when Russia first invaded Ukraine.

Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris: "In light of the recent conflict in Sudan, and the end of Title 42, it is crucial that local governments step up and support children of refugees. Refugee Empowerment Program's after-school program helps our most vulnerable kids, gives their parents an opportunity to maintain meaningful employment in Shelby County, and builds on our commitment to be an inclusive and welcoming county."

Shelby County Commissioner Henri E. Brooks: "Refugee Empowerment Program is a lifeline to hundreds of families in my district. I'm so glad that we have found a way to support this worthwhile cause, especially considering the increased need we all see when we turn on the news."

Shelby County Commissioner Erika Sugarmon: "We support the Refugee Empowerment Program which is a beacon of hope, providing the necessary tools for a brighter future for young learners. By offering after-school programs, mentors, and transportation, we ensure that these resilient individuals have the support they need to flourish in their new hometown."

Camela Echols, Executive Director, Refugee Empowerment Program: "We are extremely grateful for the partnership with Shelby County Government. The support for our after-school program came at a time of need, and thanks to this effort, we have been able to purchase a new bus for free transportation for youth and continue to serve hundreds of refugee and immigrant families."

About Refugee Empowerment Program

Refugee Empowerment Program was founded in 2002 by Sudanese refugee Ruth Lomo. Their mission is to empower refugees and immigrants in Memphis by offering high-quality, tailored programming that encourages, educates, and equips individuals, families, and the community. The after-school program, a component of REP, provides a range of services to young learners, including tutoring, homework



assistance, and educational enrichment activities. The program also offers transportation services to ensure that participants can attend and fully engage in the activities.

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