



OFFICE OF INSULAR AFFAIRS

**U.S. Department  
of the Interior**

[www.doi.gov/oia](http://www.doi.gov/oia)

## **News Release**

Date: October 20, 2015

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### **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas**

## **Interior Proposes Legislation to Expand Bikinian Islanders' Use of Resettlement Fund beyond the Marshall Islands** *Supports Bikinian Leadership Request for Flexibility in Use of Funds*

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 20, 2015) - Interior Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Esther Kia'aina has sent a letter to U.S. Senate and House congressional leadership proposing draft legislation allowing the people of Bikini to use existing resettlement and relocation funds to relocate their communities outside of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Current federal law restricts resettlement funds for use within the Marshall Islands.

“This is an appropriate course of action for the United States to take regarding the welfare and livelihood of the Bikinian people, given the deteriorating conditions on Kili and Ejit Islands in the Marshall Islands with crowding, diminishing resources, and increased frequency of flooding due to King Tides on their islands,” said Assistant Secretary Kia'aina.

Kia'aina visited the Marshall Islands last March when Bikinian leaders raised the need for changes in the federal law. Subsequently, the Kili/Bikini/Ejit Local Government Council passed a resolution on August 3, 2015, asking the U.S. Congress to pass legislation allowing for the people of Bikini to relocate and resettle within or outside the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

In 1982, the Congress, through Public Law 97-257, provided the people of Bikini a relocation and resettlement trust fund for use primarily on Kili Island and Ejit Island (Majuro Atoll) after they were relocated from their original homeland of Bikini Atoll for U.S. nuclear weapons testing. In addition to the cramped living quarters and a lack of suitable sustainable resources on Kili and Ejit, the people of Bikini have been experiencing more frequent storms and King Tides

resulting in salt water inundation and the destruction of crops. These developments have raised deep concerns about public health and safety.

Under current Federal law, the people of Bikini are entitled to live, work, and study in the United States as nonimmigrants, without visas or restrictions on the duration of their stay, pursuant to the Compact of Free Association between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The proposed legislation would allow the people of Bikini to use their available U.S. funds to resettle outside of the Marshall Islands – in the United States or elsewhere – should they decide to relocate. It would also provide the people of Bikini better options and the necessary resources for habitable and sustainable living to improve their quality of life and to plan for their future

*The Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas carries out the administrative responsibilities of the Secretary of the Interior in coordinating federal policy for the territories of American Samoa, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and administering and overseeing U.S. federal assistance to the Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau under the Compacts of Free Association. The Assistant Secretary executes these responsibilities through the Office of Insular Affairs.*

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