



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Hearing Statement of Border Security, Facilitation, & Operations Subcommittee Chairwoman Nanette Barragán (D-CA)

Operation Allies Welcome: Examining DHS's Efforts to Resettle Vulnerable Afghans

October 21, 2021

During this hearing, we will hear from diverse voices on the ground, who are working alongside the Department of Homeland Security to welcome and resettle our Afghan partners through Operation Allies Welcome. As we've heard, DHS is tasked with leading the coordination of resettling thousands of Afghans who worked alongside our military and diplomats, as well as particularly vulnerable Afghans such as journalists, human rights workers, and women activists. However, this resettlement mission requires a whole-of-community approach.

Multiple Federal agencies, resettlement organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are working day and night to welcome new arrivals into American communities. Resettlement agencies, like the International Rescue Commission, quickly operationalized to provide services and humanitarian assistance to Afghans being brought into the United States – particularly to those housed on military bases. Civil society groups, like Women for Afghan Women, are working to ensure the services administered to new arrivals meet the needs of this population while being culturally appropriate.

Afghan American-led organizations, like Women for Afghan Women, are particularly critical during this time. Many of their volunteers encompass deep knowledge of Afghan customs and languages needed to serve this population. NGOs, like Human Rights First, have been leading voices and strong advocates in efforts to evacuate, welcome, and properly support the resettlement of vulnerable Afghans here in the United States. Veterans and veteran service organizations, including organizations composed mostly of veterans like Team Rubicon, have been stepping forward and galvanizing communities to help our Afghan allies resettle and rebuild here in the United States.

Each witness represented here holds a unique perspective and is vital to our discussion. Operation Allies Welcome is well underway, with evacuees being resettled across the United States. Communities nationwide, like the ones that I represent in California, are preparing to embrace these families. Supporting those who risked their lives to help our troops over the last two decades, along with those fleeing persecution and dangerous conditions, is the right thing to do.

That is why I am proud that Congress passed a Continuing Resolution, which allows evacuees to receive refugee benefits like temporary housing, employment training, and medical care. These benefits are critical to meet immediate and long-term needs. The Continuing Resolution also includes additional funding for Federal agencies working to resettle our Afghan partners. For example, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) received additional funding to process Special Immigrant Visa and humanitarian parole applications. Other agencies received funding to augment medical support and humanitarian assistance.

As Operational Allies Welcome progresses, Congress must continue working with both Federal and non-federal partners to meet the needs of the evacuees and advance this resettlement mission. I am eager to hear from the witnesses on the needs of the Afghan evacuees and how the Department can improve services and coordination efforts under Operation Allies Welcome.

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