

EMERGENCY Refugee Advisory Board Meeting

Refugee Education & Training Center

September 9th, 2021

Board Member Attendees – Tyler Kotter, Joseph Genda, Joshua Bell, Mark Burton (for Aden Batar), Rick Bouillon, Casey Cameron (Chair), Natalie El-Deiry, Steve Pluim, Pamela Atkinson, Tino Nyawelo, Nicole Handy (for James McConkie), David Litvack (for Brent Platt), Fatima Dirie, Rick Foster, Kelli Meranda, Sarah Bates (for Hayder Allkhenfr)

Honored Guest Attendees – Luna Banuri, Nate McDonald, Jon Pierpont, Governor Spencer J. Cox, Miles Hansen

Members Excused –Bhim Sapkota, Aden Batar, James McConkie, Brent Platt, Hayder Allkhenfr, Janice Kimball

Welcome– Casey Cameron

Situation Update- Casey Cameron

- 122,000 people were evacuated from Afghanistan as of August 31st, 2021, including 60,000 vulnerable Afghans.
- 22,000 Afghans are still in transit.
- State Department ensured that every Afghan will have medical screenings and thorough vetting.
- There are 3 main groups of Afghans arriving:
 - Full SIV (Special Immigrant Visa) holders. They are assured resettlement in the U.S. and can go to their final resettlement locations and access full refugee benefits.
 - Those that are completing their SIV processing. They will be taken to military bases for further processing.
 - Parolees-they will be able to apply for asylum, but that process takes about 2 years.
 - This is the group whose needs should be discussed and preparations made for how to help them when they arrive in Utah.
- We currently do not know how many arrivals we can expect in Utah.

Governor's Remarks- Governor Spencer J. Cox

- We are living in interesting and exceptional times.
- Utah is a place of refuge for those who need it.
- People will rise to whatever challenge we put before them.
- There are so many people offering help to the refugees after his letter to the President.

Workgroup #1 Report: Housing Needs – Nate McDonald & Pamela Atkinson

- Identified need with housing will be both temporary short term housing and then more permanent housing.
- Reached out to Visit Salt Lake and they gathering names of hotel owners who would be willing to provide rooms in hotels.
 - 13 hotels stepped up. One offered an entire floor for Afghan refugees.
 - The timing of how long the hotel rooms will be needed is as yet unknown and will be dependent on how much notice is given by State Department and other factors.

- Paul Smith represents the apartment association. He says that the owners of 20,000 units are willing to help with housing Afghans. Having advance notice from the State Department of when Afghan families will arrive will be helpful to get them housing.
- Will have even greater participation if there is help paying for rent. This workgroup proposes helping with housing needs of new Afghan arrivals using second round of Emergency Rental Assistance money from the Treasury. Have confirmed with legal department and believe that this is a fit.
 - Emergency Rental Assistance money Round one was more about providing services to people who were impacted financially by COVID-19. Emergency Rental Assistance money Round two was for people who were impacted “during” COVID-19. Could use this money to secure new housing for Afghans for up to 6 months. There is a possibility that refugee resettlement agency may be able to sign the lease. Will need to set up new process that will be for new arrivals.
- Luna Banuri pointed out the Utah Muslim Civic League has been coming to the Refugee Center to offer help with rental assistance.
- Regarding healthcare, Pamela Atkinson says all refugees will need medical screening and will receive referrals to various providers.
- Many healthcare providers said they could not help as they are overworked and understaffed right now.
- Intermountain Healthcare has designated one of the school clinics to help Afghans when they arrive.
- The Association of Community Health Centers may be willing to help also.
- The Utah Department of Health has a clinic that sees many refugees and they are offering to help.
- Pamela is getting in touch with retired health care professionals to see if they would donate some of their time to help Afghan refugees as well.

Workgroup #2 Report: Basic Needs – Asha Parekh & Miles Hansen

- For targeted items and food, connected with Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and Utah Food Bank. Both are willing to increase help to Afghans given what they have available.
- For employment, RSO is able to help those who have work authorizations to find a job. This will include the parolees. Will continue to work with Horizonte on English testing.
- For monetary needs, Miles believes there will be a significant need in this area and the challenge will be how to match willingness to donate with needs, and what system will be put in place to get money where it is needed most. This system will need to be transparent. Input from the Afghan community will be absolutely essential.
- Stephen LeFevre says that the business community is calling him wanting to know where to donate money. The World Trade Center does not want to be responsible for taking any of this money, so they will need to know where to direct businesses to donate.

Workgroup #3 Report: Community Support – Luna Banuri

- UMCL wants to be able to provide legal help. Miles & Stephen will hold legal clinic for people to understand their documents.
- UMCL wants to provide the cultural connection. When people arrive they look for community, friends, and places to worship. UMCL is hoping to be effective in making the Happiness Index of Utah Muslim community, including Afghans, increase, as there is a new study out that shows that 1 in 3 Muslims in tried to commit suicide last year.
- One of the greatest aspects of the Afghan community is their hospitality.

- A United Afghan American Coalition has been established.
- There is a huge list of people in the community offering to help with translation and transportation.
- One of the founders of the United Afghan American Coalition would like people to understand that Afghans are humans first. The Coalition will try to be a bridge between the community and organizations that want to do good. The Coalition needs legal support.

Resettlement Agency Summary

- Natalie El-Deiry humbly asks that as efforts continue that resettlement agencies remain at the table. Grateful for all of the support IRC is receiving.
- Mark Burton feels that all of the community support is great. Recently CCS completed a PRM audit and they were most impressed with all of the community support in Utah.

Next Steps – Governor Spencer J. Cox

- Thanked the landlord community and hotel groups.
- Will continue to pursue using Emergency Rental Assistance Round 2 funding to help Afghans.
- DWS will help with the employment piece.
- State will focus more on Muslim suicide rates.
- Thanked the Afghan American Coalition founder for her remarks.