

## Legislative Update

**Date: October 7, 2021**

**To: Washington State Legislators**

*These “For Your Information” messages are sent on an as-needed basis to ensure that you are aware of important or high-profile issues involving the Department of Social and Health Services.*

### **Update: Afghan Resettlement in Washington State & FAQ**

On Aug. 29, 2021, the United States government initiated [Operation Allies Refuge](#) to resettle Afghan individuals and their families to safety in communities across the nation. Since 1979, Washington state has been welcoming refugees who flee persecution in their home country to rebuild their lives in our local communities. Today, Washington continues to be a welcoming place and is preparing to support those individuals and families arriving from Afghanistan. Washington state is receiving updated information from the federal government on a weekly basis. To help provide the most accurate information, DSHS will be updating this information sheet regularly.

On Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021 the federal government issued the [Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act](#). [Division C](#) of this legislation authorizes citizens or nationals of Afghanistan and their spouses or children, as defined by [8 U.S.C. § 1101\(b\)](#), who are paroled into the United States between July 31, 2021 through Sept. 30, 2022 to receive mainstream benefits, resettlement assistance and other benefits available to refugees, until March 31, 2023 or the end of their parole term, whichever is later. Additionally, if the parolee is an unaccompanied child, as defined under [6 U.S.C. 279\(g\)\(2\)](#), they are eligible to apply for the Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program.

#### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

##### **1. How many Afghan SIVs and Humanitarian Parolees will arrive in Washington?**

Through [Operation Allies Refuge](#), from July 29 – Sept. 30, 2021, Washington welcomed approximately 332 people from Afghanistan. Washington will continue to receive individuals and families from Afghanistan through this program.

As of mid-September 2021, the U.S. Department of State has approved local refugee resettlement agencies in Washington to welcome 1,679 people out of the initial 37,000 people processed. The federal government anticipates needing to resettle more than 70,000 people through Operation Allies Refugee. Washington state is expected to be in the top five states to welcome Afghan arrivals. As we learn more about the expected number of arrivals, we will provide updates.

Washington state has a long legacy of welcoming refugees and immigrants. From 2010 to 2020, Washington state welcomed approximately 30,213 refugees, including 4,166 Afghan SIVs. Just this federal fiscal year, Washington has welcomed 348 people from Afghanistan between Oct. 1, 2020 and July 30, 2021. Over the past two to three years, Washington welcomed approximately 8% of the nation’s total Afghan SIV arrivals. The highest concentration of Afghan SIVs have arrived in King County, with some resettling in Pierce, Snohomish and Spokane counties.

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### 2. How will Afghan individuals and families arrive and resettle in Washington?

Afghans will be traveling from one of the eight Safe Haven military bases across the country. Some may travel independently. The majority of Afghans will be resettled through one of our local refugee resettlement agencies. Washington state is home to five of the nine national resettlement agencies with offices located in Benton-Franklin, Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane and Whatcom counties.

Below is a chart of the local refugee resettlement agencies that will be welcoming refugees in our local communities.

Welcoming County	Refugee Resettlement Agencies
Benton-Franklin Counties	World Relief - Richland
Clark County	Lutheran Community Services Northwest (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services)
Puget Sound Region	Diocese of Olympia – (Episcopal Migration Ministries)
- King County	International Rescue Committee
- Pierce County	Jewish Family Services (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society)
- Snohomish County	Lutheran Community Services Northwest (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services)
	World Relief – Seattle
Spokane County	International Rescue Committee
	World Relief – Spokane
Whatcom County	World Relief (new in federal fiscal year 2022)

### 3. What immigration statuses will Afghan arrivals be granted?

Afghans arriving in Washington state through U.S. Operation Allies Refugee will have multiple types of immigration statuses. Many will arrive with Special Immigrant Visa status that will become lawful permanent residency or a green card. People who have submitted but have been unable to complete their applications for Special Immigrant Visa Status may be granted an SQ/SI parole immigration status with their SIV status pending. The highest concentration of individuals will be granted humanitarian parole status on a case-by-case basis.

Humanitarian parole is a temporary immigration status designated by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services that allows an individual to enter the country due to an emergency humanitarian situation. The word parolee in this context bears no meaning to the way it is commonly used to refer to someone who was previously incarcerated. Afghan parolees will be allowed to apply for asylum and will be granted employment authorization.

As of Sept. 30, 2021, all Afghan evacuees, including those with humanitarian parole status, are eligible to receive refugee resettlement services, entitlement benefits and all services to the same extent as refugees.

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### 4. What supports and resettlement services are Afghan arrivals eligible to receive?

Through Operation Allies Refuge, arriving Afghan individuals and families will be eligible for initial resettlement services, public assistance benefits and supports and longer term integration services. Initial resettlement services will be provided through the Afghan Parolee Assistance program. Local refugee resettlement agencies will administer the initial resettlement services through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State, and they will last for a minimum of 30 days and can be extended for up to 90 days. These services include securing and furnishing affordable housing and providing food and basic necessities. Resettlement case managers will assist families in applying for social security cards, accessing health screening and other necessary health services, obtaining appropriate benefits, social services and English language instruction, enrolling in employment services, registering children in school and accessing immigration legal services. They will also provide basic cultural orientation.

The table below outlines the different programs and eligibility based on Afghan immigration status.

Program	Afghan SIV or Afghan SI/SQ Parolees	Afghan Humanitarian Parolees
Refugee Resettlement Agency support	Eligible Reception and Placement	Eligible Afghan Parolee Support
Programs funded by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement	Eligible	Eligible
Washington cash and food programs	Eligible	Eligible
Apple Health (Medicaid)*	Eligible	Eligible
Refugee Health Screening	Eligible	Eligible

### 5. What social services are available to Afghan arrivals?

The DSHS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance invests more than \$25 million in federal and state dollars each year to local community organizations to provide services to refugees and immigrants. These programs and services fall into four core areas: Refugee Health and Wellness, Employment and Training, Immigration Assistance and Naturalization Services, and Whole Family Programs. Whole Family Programs offer services for kids in grades K-12 and their parents, refugee youth between ages 18-24, refugee elders and unaccompanied refugee minors. These services are available to Afghan arrivals and other refugees for up to five years.

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ORIA partners with more than 60 different organizations across the state, including refugee resettlement agencies. Afghan arrivals will be able to connect to the following programs and services:

- [Refugee Health Screenings](#) and Health Promotion Program
- [LEP Pathway Employment and ESL Programs \(SIV and Humanitarian Parolee\)](#)
- Career Ladder for Educated and Vocationally Experience Refugees or CLEVER
- [ORIA Basic Food Employment and Training Program](#)
- [PRIME Program](#)
- [Refugee School Impact Program](#)
- Refugee Elders Program
- Refugee Youth Mentoring Program

#### 6. What challenges and gaps are we seeing for the current Afghan SIV and humanitarian parolee arrivals?

##### Short-term and long-term housing

The biggest challenge in welcoming Afghan arrivals is finding sufficient, affordable temporary and permanent housing. Typically, refugee resettlement agencies receive at least 10-day notice that an Afghan SIV is arriving. With the current situation, Afghan individuals and families are frequently arriving with less than 24-hour notice. Most Afghans are coming to join family and friends who are currently living in Washington communities. They frequently want to live close to these U.S. ties to assist with their resettlement process. Due to the pandemic, hotel capacity and availability through short-term rental properties like Airbnb is limited. Assistance with finding safe and affordable housing is the most critical need at this time.

##### Mental health and trauma-informed services

The second most important challenge is responding to the mental health and trauma for individuals and families arriving in Washington. It is important to be able to offer support that is trauma-informed and culturally responsive for those who are arriving. Community members already residing in Washington may also be experiencing trauma due to being separated from family and friends and the fear and anxiety of seeing the Afghan government fall.

**Public health services:** Children from Afghanistan are disproportionately impacted by elevated blood lead levels. Local public health capacity for elevated blood lead level follow-up is limited and will be impacted by an increase in arrivals from Afghanistan. Tuberculosis and other communicable disease-related follow-up will be negatively impacted by lack of access to medical insurance and refugee health screening examinations.

**Immigration Legal Support:** We also anticipate a need to assist humanitarian parolees in applying for asylum.

#### 7. What can people do to help?

Newly arrived Afghans are in need of housing, household items, clothing and volunteer assistance. Anyone interested in helping can connect directly with local [refugee resettlement agencies](#) or [the Afghan Health Initiative](#) or directly with the DSHS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance by sending an email to [ORIAinfo@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:ORIAinfo@dshs.wa.gov).

For more information, please contact Sarah Peterson, Washington State Refugee Coordinator, at [sarah.peterson@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:sarah.peterson@dshs.wa.gov).