

## Afghan Evacuee Assistance

**Do Not Oppress the Stranger**--this is one of the most cited admonitions in the Torah. In Leviticus, God instructed that "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God" (Leviticus 19:33). While the context of this Biblical law was several millennia ago, it is as current today as it was then.

Throughout our history, Jews have been ostracized and have faced many struggles when trying to resettle in new lands and countries. As a community of immigrants and refugees, it is our duty to pursue justice for others suffering upheavals and displacements as we have generations before and to welcome the stranger.

Today, welcoming the stranger includes welcoming 76,000 Afghani citizens who assisted our military during our war on terrorism in Afghanistan from 2001-2021. These individuals have been or will be coming to the United States on emergency humanitarian visas. In most cases they were interpreters for our military, Embassy workers, drivers for our military and their family members; some are journalists and vulnerable women and girls, all of whom are imminently threatened with retaliation by the Taliban if they remained in their homeland.

As of January 31, 2022, 68,000 Afghans have been relocated to the United States. They have all been vetted by the State Department before being brought to our country. An additional 8000 are still being vetted for resettlement and are temporarily being housed on U.S. military bases.

Texas has been slated to resettle at least 4481 Afghani citizens. Dallas has a significant Afghan population and evacuees who have family here may be joining those family members. However, many do not have family in the area and will need significant assistance in making Dallas their new home. Already Temple members have stepped up and are working with over 20 new Afghan families by helping to furnish their apartments and connect them with local resources to help with finding employment, navigating language barriers, enrolling children in schools, and a myriad of other family needs to help adjust to their new lives in our country.

But more help will be needed and if you are able to volunteer or make donations (in-kind or monetary gifts) please let Erica Strauss know and she will direct you to the appropriate people or resettlement organizations working with these new residents in our community. Temple works with several of these agencies including the International Rescue Committee, Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, National Council of Jewish Women, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Dallas Area Interfaith, and Vickery Meadow.

In addition to the hands-on work of these organizations, there is Federal legislation pending that we urge you to support that would allow Afghan evacuees to have their limited immigration status changed from an emergency humanitarian visa (a status known as parolee)

to a refugee status which would give them a path to citizenship and permanent residence in our country. This Federal Bill is entitled “The Afghan Adjustment Act” and has yet to pass Congress. It is needed because the sudden collapse of the civilian government of Afghanistan to the Taliban in the late summer 2021 did not give the Afghani citizens who helped the United States conduct its military efforts in their country enough time to file their refugee applications and wait the normal 18-24 months in their home country while their applications were being processed. The distinction between entering the United States as a refugee instead of an evacuee is significant. Refugees have a clear path to citizenship and an indefinite right to remain in our country. Parolee visas are only valid for two years. After that, they could be deported back to Afghanistan! The Afghan Adjustment Act would fix that technicality.

Contacting your Senators and Congressional Representatives would help let our elected officials know that we support the passage of this Bill and support the Afghan citizens who put their lives at risk to help the United States and its allies counter global terrorism emanating from their country. Welcome the stranger, grant them the right to become American citizens.

Temple’s immigration and refugee work has been on-going for many years. Here are some examples of the immigration policy and hands-on work Temple has engaged in since 2017:

- Became a Solidarity Congregation supportive of immigrant rights and advocating for fair immigration policies (See Attached Statement, “Temple Emanu-El: A Solidarity Congregation”).
- Issued a statement in opposition to the Muslim travel ban imposed by the Trump administration prohibiting non-citizen Muslims from certain Middle East countries from entering the United States. (Attached as an Appendix to the Solidarity Congregation Statement).
- Organized and coordinated with other groups trips to the border to support humane treatment of asylum seekers including unaccompanied children from Central America.
- Opposed and sermonized against the reduction of the number of refugees the Federal government allowed into our country (the reduction was from 100,000 to 18,000 between 2017-2021).
- Urged Governor Abbott to allow resettlement of refugees in Texas.
- Co-founded the Vickery Meadow Food Pantry.
- Work alongside of refugees from Vickery Meadow in Temple’s Jill Stone Community Garden and provide the Vickery Meadow Food Pantry with its produce.
- Advocate for the Afghan Resettlement Act. We are pushing for the Federal government to recognize the immigrants to have a legal status.