

For Immediate Release

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County Supervisors push for increased funding to support incoming Afghan refugees

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF (September 10, 2021) – As the US military winds down its presence in Afghanistan, Afghan individuals and their families are being airlifted out of danger and brought to cities across the US to be resettled in this country. Santa Clara County has been made aware that up to 300 refugees will need support during the resettlement process through the two local refugee resettlement agencies, Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley (JFSSV) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

At the Sept. 14 Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors meeting, Board of Supervisors Vice President Susan Ellenberg, along with Supervisor Otto Lee, will introduce a referral directing County Administration to act with urgency to increase current funding designated for refugee resettlement services to both of these agencies.

“There is no more humanitarian act than to save a life and this is exactly what successful resettlement achieves,” said Supervisor Ellenberg. “The services provided by JFSSV and the IRC are vital to those coming to Santa Clara County. The services provided with this increased funding will help refugees adjust to the greatest extent possible without further trauma.”

In 2019, Supervisor Ellenberg championed the allocation of additional funding to the aforementioned agencies when federal funding for refugee resettlement was cut under the Trump administration.

“This issue is so incredibly personal to me, and I know that Santa Clara County will be a welcoming home to those who risked and sacrificed so much,” said Supervisor Lee. “As an immigrant, I know how important it is to provide a safe and welcoming new home for those who arrive in America, especially refugees from war-torn regions. I believe that we must fulfill the ideals of America and welcome these Afghan refugees. We must sustain the trust we have built with them. They protected us, now it is time we care and protect them.”

All of the refugees, scheduled to arrive through the next 12 months, will require immediate assistance. The services provided to refugees are a critical lifeline for many families arriving to Santa Clara County. Upon resettling refugees, the funds will enable JFSSV to provide emergency food, housing assistance, job training, counseling for those suffering from post traumatic stress, and more.

“The unfolding situation in Afghanistan is devastating. Desperation and panic strike untold numbers of Afghans whose safety is now at extreme risk,” said Mindy Berkowitz, Executive Director of Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley. “Jewish Family Services of Silicon Valley is honored to be recognized as a leader in refugee resettlement in our County. The impact of the funding proposal that will come before the Board of Supervisors is such that we will be able to more fully rescue, resettle and assist nearly 300 refugees in the next year.”

Approximately 25 people were received and resettled by JFSSV in August, and another 17 are expected to arrive in the coming weeks. With an increase in funding, refugees will be provided the necessary supports to ensure their ability to become self-supporting.

“We continue to respond and have already served over 40 Afghan arrivals since June 2021,” said Sead Eminovic, International Rescue Committee Director of the San Jose location. “Santa Clara County is a preferred destination as one of the most welcoming communities with a history of providing funding to support IRC’s county employment program and other stabilizing services critical for the integration of our newest neighbors.”

The IRC has been providing life-saving resettlement services in San Jose since 1979. Through dynamic and responsive services ranging from case management and English as a Second Language classes to career navigation and immigration assistance, the IRC in San Jose has helped over 25,000 refugees and immigrants recover and gain control of their future.

“Santa Clara county is a one of the most diverse counties in the country as it celebrates and welcomes people from all backgrounds,” said Zelica Rodriguez, Director of the County Office of Immigrant Relations. “The County is committed to providing a safety net, protections, and access to resources and services to our most vulnerable populations including immigrants and refugees. The supports to our Afghan community are in line with our mission and values as a county.”

An estimated 50,000 residents in the County are refugees. The County has historically served as a resettlement community for refugees from Bosnia, Ethiopia and Myanmar (formerly Burma).

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