

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **HOUSTON MAYOR TURNER AND HOUSTON AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT FUND AGENCIES WELCOME AFGHAN REFUGEES TO HOUSTON**

*Mayor and the collaborative agencies hosted a press conference to spread holiday cheer and provide updates on Afghan resettlement efforts, announce new gifts and welcome over 2,800 Afghans to Houston*

**HOUSTON (December 7, 2021)** – The [Houston Afghan Resettlement Fund](#) (HARF) agencies partnered with Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner to welcome more than 2,800 newly resettled Afghan refugees that have arrived in Houston due to the conflict in Afghanistan. During the press conference at Houston City Hall Tuesday, Dec. 7, the collaborative covered important Afghan resettlement updates regarding HARF’s efforts to date, announced new generous donations to the Fund and restated the urgent need for continued community support this holiday season. Additionally, attendees had the opportunity to hear from Matthew Abid, an Afghan SIV staff member from a HARF agency. He was embedded with the U.S. Marines in Afghanistan for 6 years as a translator and spoke to his journey as well as his experience with Afghan parolee resettling efforts in Houston. Since HARF’s inception in Sept. 2021, the collaborative has aided over 2,800 Afghan refugees collectively and anticipates a total of approximately 6,000 evacuees to arrive in Houston through 2022.

In Sept. 2021, four CEOs from The Alliance, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston and YMCA of Greater Houston [announced they formed HARF](#) to raise support for vetted Afghan families who are resettling to the Houston area. This multi-agency collaboration established the Fund with a goal to raise \$8.5 million that will provide critical needs for Houston’s new neighbors during their resettlement. Since its inception, the Fund has raised nearly \$4 million through private donations to aid evacuees.

Donations to HARF have directly supported Afghan families by establishing households – including furnishings, food and other essentials – securing employment, enrolling in schools, finding transportation, learning English as a second language, arranging medical services, coordinating legal services, providing cultural orientation and obtaining welcoming resources on arrival.

[Houston Endowment](#) and [The Kinder Foundation](#), two prominent Houston philanthropic organizations, kicked off efforts with their equal anchor gifts and collectively donated \$3 million to HARF in September. HARF is pleased to share it has received four additional generous gifts since the initial donations: The Ting Tsung and Wei Fong Chao Foundation, a Houston-based foundation with a focus on furthering cultural, civic and higher education institutions, contributed a charitable amount of \$320,000. [The New York Times](#), a global publication known to provide support for humanitarian causes donated \$250,000. [Arnold Ventures](#), a Houston-based philanthropic organization founded by John and Laura Arnold and devoted to tackling pressing problems in the United States, gifted \$50,000. [The PepsiCo Foundation](#), one of the world’s leading food and beverage companies with decades of philanthropic work, committed \$50,000 in support of the collaborative’s cause.

The Afghan evacuees who have arrived are classified as “humanitarian parolees,” which is an emergency designation granted when there is an urgent humanitarian reason or significant public benefit to allow

evacuees to temporarily enter the United States. This designation qualifies for minimal federal funding and benefits unlike a traditional refugee who receives more government support. As of late September 2021, Afghan parolees have become eligible for additional government funding and public benefits, including cash and medical assistance programs. However, government funding still only covers a portion of resettlement efforts while private funding would cover the remaining balance needed, including immediate housing and food costs, and additional legal services that the parolees will incur as they apply for permanent residence through an asylum designation. There is a continued need for private funding to help these families make a successful transition to self-sufficiency.

“The City of Houston remains committed to helping resettle new Afghan evacuees in our community. We look forward to welcoming more families in 2022 alongside impactful collaboratives such as HARF,” said Sylvester Turner, Mayor of Houston. “Arriving with only what they can carry, evacuees desperately seek haven and support in the U.S, and I believe our community can rise to the challenge as we embrace our new neighbors. Our city retains a moral obligation to continue to provide resources that will assist our Afghan allies as they transition to their new homes and lives.”

“We are pleased to help support the important work of the Houston Afghan Resettlement Fund and the agencies that have partnered -- along with the broader Houston community -- to welcome and support so many Afghan refugees,” said Rebecca Blumenstein, deputy managing editor, The New York Times. “We are especially appreciative of Catholic Charities, which has provided our group of former Times employees and their families with expert care and guidance as they navigate resettlement.”

“These families were selfless in their support of the men and women in uniform, and providing them a warm welcome as they resettle in the U.S. is the least we can do,” said Jon Banner, Executive Vice President, Global Communications, PepsiCo and President, The PepsiCo Foundation. “The PepsiCo Foundation is proud to work with dedicated partners like Catholic Charities through the Houston Afghan Resettlement Fund to provide them with immediate support as they begin building new lives in the Greater Houston area.”

To donate to HARF, individuals, corporations, houses of worship and organizations can donate directly here: <https://houstonafghanhelp.org>. Additionally, the agencies are asking for individual donations of personal items to set up their new home. Catholic Charities is requesting gift cards for Target or Walmart. [Interfaith Ministries](#) is requesting food gift cards. The YMCA of Greater Houston has set up an [Amazon Wishlist](#) and is accepting new mattresses. The Alliance is accepting [donations of household goods and furniture](#).

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## **About Houston Afghan Resettlement Fund**

Houston refugee resettlement organizations – The Alliance, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, and YMCA of Greater Houston – are coordinating fundraising efforts to build a system of care for the good of all Afghans coming to Houston. This multi-agency collaboration gives funders and philanthropists the opportunity to welcome the stranger and provide for the critical needs of Houston’s new neighbors during their resettlement.

# HOUSTON AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT FUND



Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston is taking the fiscal management duties, accepting and distributing funds on behalf of the agencies.