



USCIS MUST WAIVE FEES FOR AFGHAN REFUGEES

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

While 70,000 Afghans, many of whom risked their lives to help the American military, were safely evacuated to the US in August, 2021, in the chaos of the evacuation, thousands of family members were separated. HIAS Pennsylvania has resettled 110 Afghans since September, 2021 and these include a family whose two-year-old got left behind, three young teenagers who got separated from their parents, two husbands who were separated from their pregnant wives and children, a wife and her children were separated from her husband and the children's father and on and on. These left behind family members are being threatened, assaulted and starved by the Taliban and are in danger every minute of every day.

Despite this, the US has so far refused to create any kind of emergency process to get these people out of Afghanistan. There are three potential legal pathways: obtaining refugee status, seeking asylum or obtaining humanitarian parole. The first pathway takes several years as well as a harrowing escape from Afghanistan potentially without a passport to a third country. The second pathway can only occur from inside the U.S. and therefore is not something available to Afghans who remain in Afghanistan. The last pathway, seeking humanitarian parole, is therefore the only option open to Afghans still in Afghanistan. However, a major barrier to that application must be dismantled first. We need USCIS to waive all fees for this critical ticket out.

USCIS currently charges \$575 per person to anyone seeking that status. This is an outrageous demand for someone whose country and economy has collapsed and which has collapsed precisely because of US actions. It's also outrageous given the purpose behind the humanitarian parole petition – to provide a visa to someone who is in danger. There is nothing in the law that says that it is meant to only help wealthy people who are in danger and yet, the only way to get that fee waived is to file additional paperwork that slows down the consideration of the petition.

Our Afghan families are newly arrived themselves and are doing their best to settle into life in the United States, no easy feat at the best of times. Worrying about the safety of family members while trying to gather the fees necessary to save countless family members has

been a huge source of anxiety. Imagine, for just one family with 22 relatives—one of whom was executed by the Taliban in the early Fall because he was a member of the former Afghan military—would need to raise \$12,650 to pay fees before a petition will even be reviewed!

This is not the time to maintain barriers to access in the form of fees. We are therefore demanding, given the current situation that was created by our government, that USCIS immediately waive these fees. This is one piece of unnecessary red tape that would ease the burden.

CALL/LETTER SCRIPT

My name is _____ and I live at _____ and I vote. I am calling to demand that you: 1) publicly acknowledge that Afghan separated families must be re-united as soon as possible and 2) work with the President and USCIS to ensure that they waive all fees for humanitarian parole. Charging fees for humanitarian-based immigration applications is outrageous and inconsistent with the intentions behind our refugee and asylum laws. The United States cannot only provide humanitarian remedies to the wealthy and still be in good standing with its international partners. Failure to do this small thing will have large impacts across the world as charges that the US abandons its allies get louder and as Afghans that have been resettled here are forced to begin their new lives without their families.

Note: For this script, it would be more effective if you were able to add any kind of personal story—either about your own or your family’s immigration experience if there was humanitarian need, or about a loved one, a colleague, a neighbor or a friend. If you have no personal immigration stories you can add information about why you think it is important to make sure that there is a remedy for all, without regard to fees.

Contact your legislators and the **President** directly and ask them to waive fees attached to humanitarian parole applications today. Demand that USCIS waive fees for Afghans who are fleeing for their lives. We owe them at least that.