



Interim Study

**Examining the Afghan Placement and Assistance (APA)
Program in Oklahoma**

Senator Carri Hicks

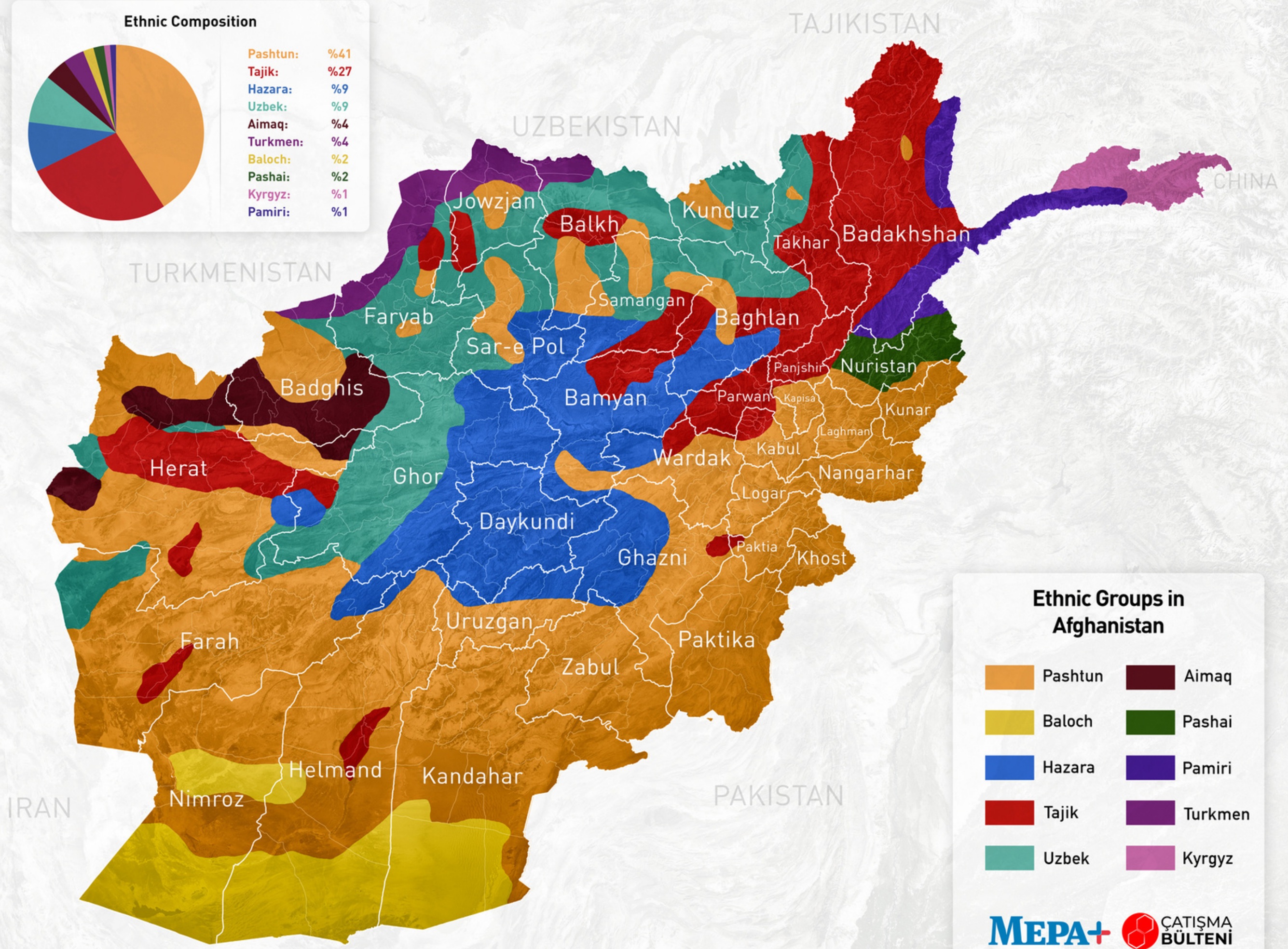
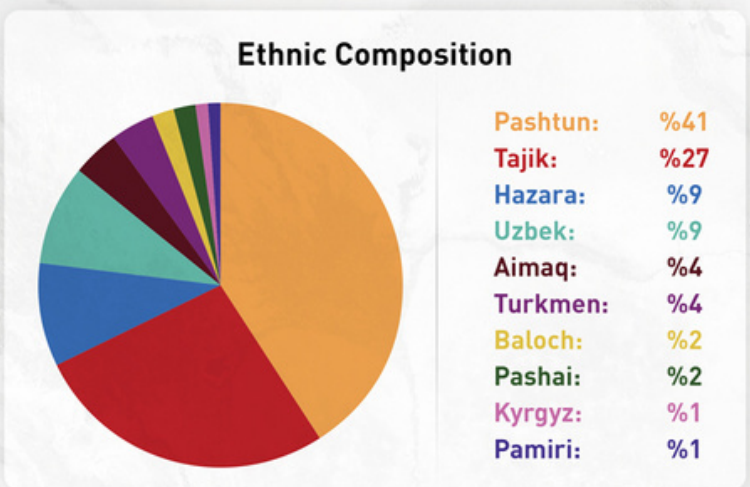
About Afghanistan



Veronica Laizure
CAIR-OK
Deputy Director

- ◆ **Earliest people 500BCE: Multi-ethnic, multicultutural**
landlocked in the heart of south-central Asia. Central to trade routes connecting cultures, wealth and goods (Silk Road).
- ◆ **"Two official state languages" Pashto and Dari**
With a variety of languages in areas spoken as a majority "shall be third official language" (Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pachaie, Nuristani, Baluchi, Pamiri)
- ◆ **Islam: Since 7th century, now a majority Muslim country**
 - Clothing
 - Practices
 - 90 % Sunni, 10% Shia
 - Halal Diet





Conflicts in Afghanistan



- ◆ **"Graveyard of Empires"** many empires (and later nations) sought to claim the land, but geographical location, tribal makeup, and physical terrain befell many.
- ◆ **Since the Soviet Union invasion in 1979, Afghanistan has been plighted by foreign invasions, civil war, insurgency and oppressive Taliban rule.**
- ◆ **2021 Fall of Kabul- over 120,00 allies airlifted out of the country, became largest non-combatant evacuation operation in U.S. military history.**
- ◆ **United States: Resettled 72,000 Afghans who worked with U.S. military, aid agencies, human rights groups or groups that are under threat from the Taliban.**

Influx of Afghan Refugees in Oklahoma

- ◆ Announcement from Gov. Stitt for Oklahoma to accept these allies into our home. Oklahoma was set to receive the highest number per capita, and third-highest overall (CA, TX).
- ◆ People were airlifted out of the country to military bases across the world, then to bases in the United States. From there, short-term stays and finally long-term lodging.
- ◆ Currently in Oklahoma, over 1,800 new Afghan neighbors.
 - *Since resettling just in OKC, 40 babies have been born.*

JOURNEY OF A REFUGEE TO THE USA

Refugee Flees

There are three options available to a person who flees their country of origin:

Repatriation
Able to return to his/her home country

Nationalization
Unable to return and stays in the country to which he/she fled

Resettlement in a Third Country

The individual is sent to a third country for resettlement. This is the last option for individuals who flee, and available to less than 1% annually.

Allocated to VOLAG

The refugee is assigned to one of the 9 national voluntary agencies (VOLAGs) for resettlement.

Notified of US Resettlement Site

The refugee is informed of US resettlement site. Cultural orientations are conducted to help refugees prepare for life in the US.

Resettlement Agency Prepares for Arrival

A caseworker is assigned to the case; arrangements are made for housing, furniture, and food.

US Admissions Program Processing

The refugee is screened by multiple US security agencies, interviewed by Dept of Homeland Security/US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and evaluated for any medical concerns.



Allocated to Resettlement Site

The refugee is assigned to a specific agency in a chosen US city.



Flight Booked

The flight is booked and the resettlement agency is notified of the date of arrival.



Refugee Arrives in US Resettlement City

Tennessee Office
for Refugees

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."

Catholic Charities
of Tennessee, Inc.
ACTS OF LOVE,
GOODWILL
AND KINDNESS

Refugee Resettlement

- ◆ Although they meet the legal definition of refugees, our new Afghan community did not enter the country through the typical refugee path.
 - Humanitarian parole was fastest way to evacuate them.
- ◆ State agencies involved with resettlement:
 - Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City (Western OK)
 - Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma (Tulsa, Stillwater)
 - Hebrew International Aid Society (HIAS)
- ◆ Numbers for refugees is set by the President of the United States, and funding sent by federal government.

Current system massively backlogged.

Outreach to CAIR & interagency work



- ◆ In the span of 5 months, hundreds of new families arrived in Oklahoma in an unprecedented resettlement.
- ◆ Federal funds distributed through Community Cares Partners allowed for families to receive payment for rent and utilities for a limited time.
- ◆ With Catholic Charities leading as the primary resettlement agency, many other organizations became involved due to the sheer number of people.
 - Spero Project
 - CAIR OK
 - Volunteers, interfaith community

Catholic Charities Role

◆ Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City is a statewide resettlement agency. They helped resettle over 1,800 Afghan refugees in OK - the highest number in its history.

◆ First family arrived: 09/22/2021

Last family arrival: 02/16/2022

Notified one week before first family, previous clients average was 1-2 weeks.

Some families arrived with no notice at all.

◆ From 2017- 2022 (5 years) CCAOKC received 309 total refugees, average of 62 per year
2021: 21 people



Patrick Raglow
OKC Catholic Charities
Executive Director

Catholic Charities - By the Numbers

- ◆ **Typical Reception and Placement: \$1,225 cash per family member. Usually have family ties, withing 48 hours review and sign lease.**
 - **Money is used for rent, utilities, furniture, etc. Only receive \$25 in hand.**
 - **90 Day program**
- ◆ **Humanitarian parolees who arrive as "walk-ins" are not typically eligible for welcome money or assistance.**
 - **Depend on SNAP, Medicaid and Refugee Cash Assistance (about \$190 per person).**
- ◆ **Initially, families were not eligible for direct cash assistance. However, due to the nature of their arrival, the APA program was updated to allow for \$1,225 per family member.**
 - **Also Employment Authorization Documents (EADs), SNAP and Medicaid.**

Catholic Charities -Arrival



- ◆ Overall, \$8 million went through CCAOKC for direct assistance, legal, and education support.
- ◆ While in short-term housing, partnership between Western Heights, Hobby Lobby and Spero Project to provide children with school.
- ◆ OKC Afghan Legal Network
 - Free legal assistance, since parolee status is only for 2 years.
- ◆ Needs were great and direct support through rides to appointments, mental health support, furnishings for apartments, free legal assistance came from community.
 - Many community sponsors continue to provide ongoing support.

Catholic Charities -Arrival & Housing

Short-term stays in hotels

- ◆ Average stay: 5 months
- ◆ Large families 9+ people sharing 2-3 rooms
- ◆ No kitchenettes: had to have food brought in, cost over \$2,000,000.
- ◆ Children needing to start school, no childcare, family & cultural differences among arrivals.
- ◆ Champion Hotels, local chain had a hotel available for newly arrived families. Once past capacity, folks would stay at other hotels.
- ◆ Helped sustain hotel industry in OKC & Tulsa

*Estimated taxes collected:
\$998,740.48*

Impact of Cash Assistance vs Housing Costs



- ◆ **For family of 2: $2 \times \$1,225 = \$2,450$**
- ◆ **\$780/month: Median cost of 1 bedroom apartment in OKC. \$8,496/year**
 - **Does not include deposit**
 - **Average utilities cost/month: \$397/month.**
 - **1 year: \$4,764**
- ◆ **Rent/utilities for 1 year: \$13,260**
 - **Does not include any other expenses (healthcare, food, baby care items, furnishings)**

Challenges of long-term housing

◆ Lack of availability for larger family, affordable housing (-81,000)

◆ Poor quality:

- lack of maintenance
- A/C going out (or non-existent)
- Flooding, sewage backups
- Pest infestations

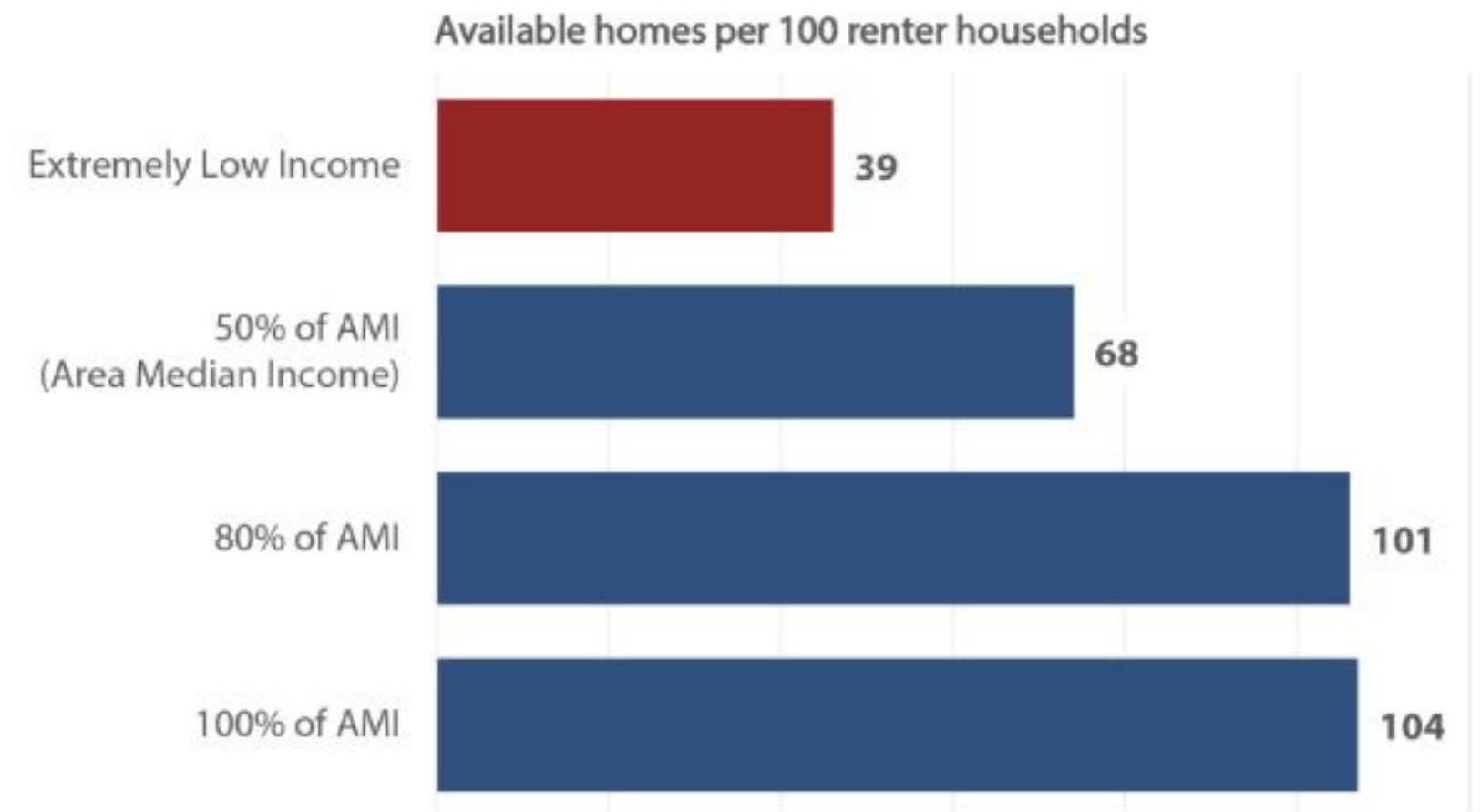
◆ Unresponsive Management

- Out-of-town investors

◆ Discrimination

◆ Unwilling to rent to clients with limited background

Oklahoma does not have enough affordable homes to meet the needs of low-income households



Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition 2023 data

Funding via Community Cares Partners



Short-term stays

- ◆ **Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) administered by Community Cares Partners (CCP), a program of Communities Foundation of Oklahoma.**
 - ERAP1- 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act
 - ERAP2- American Rescue Plan
- ◆ **For ERA-eligible APA clients, ERAP1 & ERAP2 covered short-term stay as they were considered temporarily displaced from their primary residence or not having a permanent residence elsewhere.**
 - Citizenship was not a criteria (income threshold, housing instability, financial hardship)

CCP Funding (1/2)

- ◆ CCP provided up to 18 months for rent and 15 for utilities per household. This included the amount of time spent in short-term housing against the 18 months.

- From September 2021- August 2022

- ◆ Paid directly to landlords and utility companies.

- ◆ **Number of Households**

- Applications: 529
- Paid: 435

Family Members

- Total Applied: 1,911
- Total Paid: 1,746
- Average: 3.62
- Low: 1, High: 12

CCP Funding (2/2)



Total Money Spent

- Disbursed in Neighborly: \$8,586,860.47
- Hotels: \$5,667,423.28
- Reimbursements: \$443,864.90

Number of Months Rent Covered

- Total Months of Rent: 5,825
- Years Conversion: 485
- Average: 13.64

Overall Total \$14,698,148.65

The Spero Project

◆ Since 2009, The Spero Project has welcomed refugees by connecting them to their new neighbors, resources, and learning opportunities that make Oklahoma City a place of belonging.

◆ **Services Include:**

- English classes
- Translation services
- School Liasons
- Youth mentoring
- Employment specialist
- Healthcare liason



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Kim Bandy
Executive Director

The Spero Project- Challenges



◆ Employment: Income not matching needs

- Average wages per earner: \$15
- Average earners per family: 1

◆ Barriers to employment:

- Language
- Education/Certifications not transferrable
- Transportation
- Cultural Differences

◆ State IDs/Documentation: Difficult to get, language barriers

Previous Employment and Qualifications

◆ Bachelors

- Accounting
- Education
- Political Science
- English
- Business
- Mechanical Engineering
- Architecture
- Physiotherapy
- Physical Therapy
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Science
- Environmental Engineering
- Nurse
- Nurse (midwife)

◆ Masters

- Accounting
- Business
- Civil Engineering
- Urban Planning
- Journalism
- Public Law
- International Studies

◆ PhD

- Veterinary Medicine
- Communications
- International Law
- Health Education
- Dentistry

◆ Technical Training

- Plumber
- Security (military)
- Truck Driver (military equipment)
- Medic (military trained trauma care)
- Fixed wing pilot (military aircraft)
- HVAC
- Small electronics repair

◆ Additional Occupations (not all)

- Agriculture and Produce
- Afghan Security Forces
- Auto Mechanic
- Electrician, Welder, HVAC
- Medic/Doctor (civilian hospital)
- Interpreter

A Veteran & Volunteer's Perspective

- ◆ Deployed to Kabul, Afghanistan 2003-2004 with the 45th Infantry Brigade as a member of Task Force Phoenix II for partnership with and training of the Afghan Army in convoy and logistics missions.
- ◆ Deployed to Laghman Province, Afghanistan 2011-2012 with the 45th Brigade Special Troops Battalion, Task Force Cheyenne. Trained and participated in Female Engagement Teams and security assistance missions. Worked "shohna ba shohna" shoulder to shoulder with the Afghan 1st Brigade, 201st Corps.
- ◆ Volunteered with CAIR for food and clothing distribution for Afghan refugees.



Kerri Keck
Veteran & Volunteer

The Jewish Community

Experiences and Challenges of Afghan Refugee Resettlement

◆ Transportation

◆ Housing

◆ Healthcare challenges

◆ Licenses and certificates



Resettlement from a Sponsor's Perspective

Christine & Jeff Poyner

- ◆ Challenges transporting kids to & from school
- ◆ Housing accommodations for families
- ◆ Challenges end up on the backs of community members when not addressed by the state/nonprofits



Dr. Feroz Bashari- Afghan Community Member



Kabul, Afghanistan

Conclusion- CAIR



◆ Partnerships through the process:

- **Arrivals: Welcome network, volunteers delivering food, hygiene items, clothes, food and meal boxes**
- **Resource Center opening March 2022 to distribute clothes, household goods, and more; became a community center for people to meet, connect, and learn**
- **Interfaith Partnerships: Christians across all denominations, including LDS, Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist.**
 - **Family sponsorships**
 - **Volunteer sessions for RRC at CAIR Office**

Donation Drives



Backpacks Fall 2022



Winter Coats 2022

Moving Forward

- ◆ Interfaith partnerships
- ◆ Eid celebration
- ◆ Dental screenings and health clinics
- ◆ Women's Day Out
- ◆ Entrepreneurship training and support
- ◆ Individual-level connection with neighbors, colleagues, and friends



Infant Crisis Services

Diaper Donation Drop off

Primary Care and Urgent Care

2921 SW 89th St

OKC, OK 73159



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (1/3)

Structure for interagency communication and collaboration

State to local agencies:

Many efforts through this process were managed single-handedly by non-profits and supported by federal funds. Future endeavors need state support to adequately resettle allies and immigrants.

- Database for information on housing and healthcare, for new arrivals and sponsors
- Statewide coordinated "disaster response" mechanism to put agencies, volunteers, and providers on the same page

State to federal level:

Initiatives of this scale require cooperation and collaboration between the state and federal level.

- Open lines of communication between federal (USCIS) and state agencies helps provide timely services to families who are in desperate needs.
- Federal agencies need to know what states are experiencing.
- Statewide leadership could convince federal lawmakers to make decisions that support vulnerable Oklahomans.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (2/3)

Affordable Housing

Lack of safe, quality housing stock at prices families can afford.

"We had better housing in Afghanistan"

Lack of protections for renters

- Predatory (often out-of-state) landlords violate the Oklahoma Residential Landlord and Tenant Act or the terms of the lease.
- The requirements of habitability for a dwelling under the law do not include things like air conditioning in the summer or timely repairs to necessary services like plumbing or basic safety precautions.
- The Spero Project and their volunteers had to buy dozens of window A/C units when central cooling went out and the property manager did not fix it, forcing families to live in 90°+ indoors.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (3/3)

State Documents & Licensures

Drivers License and IDs

Hard to obtain without prior paperwork...

- Much of which had to be destroyed for safety as people fled for their lives.
- Professional licenses are impossible to transfer, forcing people into lower-income jobs.

Birth Certificates, Marriage Licenses, Etc.

Expensive to be re-done at cost to families.

- CDLs can only be tested in English and require proof of citizenship or permanent residency.
- This is a barrier to employment, language-learning, and further education.
- Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) are not being quickly renewed at the federal level, leaving many Afghan workers at risk of losing jobs, income, and housing.

Questions from Members



Veterans & Military Affairs

Chaired by Senator Brenda Stanley