

Bipartisan Support for Welcome Lives On: From Afghanistan to Arizona

Reflections on US state policy development and support to newly arrived Afghans

Upon the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021, tens of thousands of Afghans affiliated with the U.S. sought emergency relocation and refuge in America. As the federal government stood up an emergency system to relocate and process Afghan refugees, states across the country demonstrated overwhelming, bipartisan support in welcoming Afghans to their communities. This support was not just shown in the words of state leaders, but also in their policy actions, as systems were immediately built to ensure that the infrastructure and resources needed would be available to help new neighbors in need. A year later, we know that this substantive support was not a fleeting moment due to politics, but a durable demonstration of values.

Now, Congress is considering the [Afghan Adjustment Act](#), which would afford these same Afghan refugees a pathway to permanent residency, just like the thousands of refugees the U.S. admits each year from other regions of the world. As Congress debates whether this bill should be sent to the President’s desk to be signed into law, states’ approaches to welcoming Afghans have shown just how large, and how substantive, the groundswell of support for our new Afghan neighbors is – regardless of political affiliation – across the country.

Governors’ Statements

In the days following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Governors began to release statements about their willingness to welcome and resettle newly evacuated Afghans. In total, [thirty-five governors from both political parties](#) asserted their warm support for resettling these Afghans to their state. Below is a snapshot of a few of these statements:

<i>Governor JB Pritzker of Illinois</i> Tweet	<i>Governor Asa Hutchinson of Arkansas</i> Tweet
<i>Governor Larry Hogan of Maryland</i> Tweet/Video	<i>Governor J Kevin Stitt of Oklahoma</i> Tweet
<i>Governor Jay Inslee of Washington</i> Letter to the Administration	<i>Governor Doug Ducey of Arizona</i> Tweet
<i>Governor Spencer Cox of Utah</i> Tweet	<i>Governor Phil Murphy of New Jersey</i> Tweet

State Welcoming Efforts

The statements of support from state leaders were followed by government organization and policy change. Governors and state legislatures took action in the forms of holistic state coordination, budget and resource support, and legislative measures.

Whole-of-State Approach

Both New Jersey and Colorado took a “whole-of-state approach” when determining what systems and resources would be needed to welcome arriving Afghans, which required innovation and comprehensive coordination among state agencies.

Governor Polis and the state of **Colorado** implemented an Afghan Response and Support Working Group, which drew on cross-agency partnerships, coordinated with local governments, and secured additional assistance from non-profit and private sectors in an effort to streamline the state’s welcoming and reception of Afghans.

Similar to Colorado, Governor Murphy and the state of **New Jersey** established a task force to ensure coordination among state agencies and maintain communication with federal government representatives. The task force also created a mechanism meant to coordinate organizations and individuals who were seeking to provide aid and support to Afghan arrivals.

[Click here to learn more](#) about Colorado & New Jersey’s approaches to welcoming Afghans.

Legislative Action

Led by **Arizona** State Representative and US army veteran Steve Kaiser, the Arizona State House unanimously adopted a [resolution](#) that honored the service foreign interpreters provide to the U.S. military around the globe. The resolution highlights Afghan interpreters specifically and acknowledges that many of them have been targeted because of their affiliation with the U.S. military. According to Rep. Kaiser’s remarks at this year’s [state legislative summit](#), “They kept me safe while I was over there, and I want to keep them safe while they are over here.”

In **Virginia**, the newly formed AAPI Caucus [introduced a resolution](#) expressing solidarity with Afghans and calling on the U.S. Government to offer safe passage for those at risk of persecution. At the start of the session, the caucus also [led the introduction of a bill package](#) that included resourcing for resettlement agencies; improving language accessibility in schools and state agencies; and supporting certain internationally trained professionals to re-credential in the state.

State Resourcing

Several state legislatures recognized the urgency of the moment, resourcing programs that would assist Afghans arriving in their states, helping them to rebuild their lives and integrate into their new communities.

In **Massachusetts**, Governor Charlie Baker signed into law a [supplemental spending bill](#) that allocated \$12 million to help resettle Afghans. Up to 75% of that funding was set aside to go directly to arriving families, while the remaining 25% would bolster the budgets of refugee resettlement organizations providing services. Nearly 2,000 Afghans have resettled in Massachusetts in the past year.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul committed \$5 million in state funding designed to help about 1,800 new Afghan arrivals [“reach economic, educational, and social self-sufficiency”](#) upon resettlement in New

York. This funding resourced programs such as cultural orientation; access to mental health services; access to job training and job placement; case management services to support school enrollment for children.

Washington State legislators passed a budget amendment that invested [\\$28.4 million of state funds](#) for Afghan evacuees, importantly including eligibility for refugees in need from other regions of the world. These funds can be used through FY23, toward services including housing, food assistance, immigration and legal services, education access for children, employment support, and more.

Concluding Thoughts

In the wake of the U.S. government's efforts to relocate and resettle Afghans, states moved without hesitation to show leadership and creativity in ensuring welcome. Whether it was messages of support, resourcing critical programs to bolster integration, or coordinating a response plan across state government agencies – these initiatives showed government words and actions that express welcoming refugees as a core value.

But the work is not done. A year after leaving Kabul, Afghans are thinking about their ability to regain control of their lives – whether planning, working, or getting ready for school. As they begin to plan for their futures, the fear of having to return to Afghanistan remains a possibility, unless Congress acts to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act. State leaders, both across the U.S. and across the political divide, have shown that refugee welcome is robust in America. [It is time for Congress to harness this support and fulfill the U.S. commitment to our new Afghan neighbors.](#)