



# CITIES for ACTION

December 13, 2021

## VIA EMAIL

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
Office of the President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Kamala Harris  
The White House  
Office of the Vice President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Secretary Xavier Becerra  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
200 Independence Ave. S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Secretary Antony Blinken  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
3801 Nebraska Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear President Biden, Vice President Harris, Secretary Becerra, Secretary Blinken, and Secretary Mayorkas:

In line with the Biden administration's vision of a fair, functional, and humane immigration system, we write to share our recommendations regarding support to our new Afghan and Haitian neighbors seeking to rebuild their lives. The conditions in both countries are extremely volatile, and it is incumbent upon the United States to implement policies that recognize this fact. We respectfully recommend that (1) the Biden administration and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) create a categorical humanitarian parole program for Afghans and Haitians, and fully restore the Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program; and (2) commit federal government funding to help localities and communities provide legal services and housing supports for both populations to comfortably resettle in the United States.

### **Urgent Need for Humanitarian Relief**

In cases where there is an "urgent humanitarian reason" or "significant public benefit" to allowing someone to temporarily enter the United States, humanitarian parole may be used.<sup>1</sup> In the case of both Afghanistan and Haiti, the need is immense for a categorical program that considers parole for all Afghans and Haitians who meet pre-set criteria. Afghanistan is facing a humanitarian crisis<sup>2</sup> due to severe drought, recurrent natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, and most critically the destructive impact<sup>3</sup> of Taliban rule, including violence, unemployment, a banking and economic crisis, and lack of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/forms/explore-my-options/humanitarian-parole>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/afghanistan-emergency.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/afghanistan/overview#1>

access to education and jobs for women<sup>4</sup> – half the population of the country. Haiti has one of the highest levels of food insecurity in the world, compounded by recent powerful earthquakes, hurricanes, political instability, and violence. According to the World Food Programme, half the population—nearly 4.3 million people—do not have enough to eat.<sup>5</sup>

We urge the Biden administration to create a categorical humanitarian parole program to welcome at-risk Afghans to safety. Such a program should cover Afghans with U.S. ties or family members in the U.S. In addition, we urge the administration to expedite processing of Afghans referred to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), including P-1, P-2, P-3, and I-730 (follow-to-join) referrals, as well as Afghans who have applied for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), and other family reunification programs. Any categorical parole program, as well as the USRAP and SIV programs, should ensure processing of individuals who remain in Afghanistan and other host countries. More broadly, the administration should identify additional pathways to safety for at-risk Afghans who do not qualify for the SIV or USRAP program.<sup>6</sup> We need equitable solutions for the populations to whom the U.S. has committed to provide a pathway to safety.

We thank the Biden administration and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for re-designating and extending Temporary Protected Status (TPS)<sup>7</sup> for Haiti, and for restarting the Haitian Family Reunification Parole program.<sup>8</sup> However, given the magnitude of the current crisis in Haiti and the urgent humanitarian need, we recommend a categorical parole program that allows Haitian migrants to enter the United States and seek safety – not be deported to Haiti where they will face a continuing humanitarian crisis. Any categorical parole program should include necessary federal resources to implement such a program effectively and efficiently. We also urge the full restoration of the Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP). Under CHEP, Cuban and Haitian entrants—including parolees—are able to apply for benefits and services from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>9</sup> The assistance with obtaining basic necessities and case management services is vital for Haitians' ability to support themselves and their families in the United States.

### **Urgent Need for Local Resources**

In addition, in line with our shared goal of ensuring our new Afghan and Haitian neighbors are successful in their new home, we request that localities and communities be provided with the federal resources to support resettlement efforts. We thank the Biden administration and Congress for advocating for and passing H.R. 5305, the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act, which secures additional funding for U.S. government agencies and refugee resettlement agencies to help Afghan allies and their families rebuild their lives in the United States – particularly for humanitarian

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/29/list-taliban-policies-violating-womens-rights-afghanistan#>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/haiti-emergency>

<sup>6</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, individuals who do not have a verifiable U.S. affiliation and are not known to the U.S. Embassy (and thus do not qualify for P-1), but who were engaged in activities that make them targets of Taliban reprisals, such as civil servants, women's rights advocates, election workers, human rights lawyers, academics, and journalists. We also recommend including individuals who worked on U.S.-funded sub-contracts or sub-grants.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-haiti>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/humanitarian-parole/the-haitian-family-reunification-parole-hfrp-program>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.uscis.gov/archive/cuban-haitian-entrant-program-chep>

parolees who did not have access to the same set of resettlement benefits as refugees and SIVs until this was passed. However, that additional funding does not address the local level challenges of securing safe, affordable long-term housing for Afghan families or the need for free or affordable legal services that Afghans will need to adjust their legal status. Haitians are excluded from this resource, adding more strain to the local legal landscapes who already struggle offering low or pro bono services.

### **Legal Support**

Humanitarian parole is temporary, and only allows Afghans to stay in the United States for a period of two years; barring passage of an *Afghan Adjustment Act*, Afghans will need legal representation to apply for asylum to have the chance to stay here permanently. And while Haiti is currently designated for TPS,<sup>10</sup> that is also a temporary status and requires adjustment via legal representation. Local legal service providers often have a backlog of asylum cases, and there is high unmet need that will increase as Afghan families are resettled in communities and as we see increased need for support to Haitian migrants.<sup>11</sup> Local resources are also necessary to train pro bono attorneys to prepare and file asylum claims. Federal funding to expand legal service provisions will go a long way toward ensuring localities and communities can manage the increase in adjustment of legal status cases resulting from Afghan and Haitian arrivals.

### **Housing Support**

While Afghans are being resettled in communities around the country, many are arriving in places with existing Afghan communities, such as California and Virginia, that struggle with availability of affordable housing. In addition to limited availability and high cost, many property managers and owners also reject refugee and asylum-seeking applicants citing a lack of credit, rental history, or immediate employment – leading to discrimination against this population due to circumstances outside of their control. Federal solutions, such as landlord incentive programs, could help prevent existing housing challenges from getting worse. It is equally imperative that there is a long-term investment in building infrastructure of affordable units that are safe, stable, and secure permanent housing. Haitians are also facing severe housing challenges. While eligible Haitians may apply for work authorization at the same time as registering for TPS, USCIS processing could take three months or longer.<sup>12</sup> The longer it takes to receive work authorization, the longer it takes to find formal employment, produce pay stubs, and establish credit that would reassure property managers and owners that rent owed will be paid on time.

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<sup>10</sup> Although DHS designated Haiti for TPS, it has not updated the “continuous presence” eligibility date to account for the magnitude-7.2 earthquake Haiti suffered on August 14<sup>th</sup>. Thirty mayors from our coalition sent a letter on August 31<sup>st</sup> urging the administration to update the “continuous presence” date in response to this tragedy. [https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/citiesforaction/pages/48/attachments/original/1630420366/C4A\\_TPS\\_Mayoral\\_Sign-On\\_Letter\\_FINAL.pdf?1630420366](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/citiesforaction/pages/48/attachments/original/1630420366/C4A_TPS_Mayoral_Sign-On_Letter_FINAL.pdf?1630420366)

<sup>11</sup> [https://zff.org/wp-content/uploads/GCIR\\_Legal-Services-Assessment-February-2020.pdf](https://zff.org/wp-content/uploads/GCIR_Legal-Services-Assessment-February-2020.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/outreach-engagements/Temporary\\_Protected\\_Status\\_and\\_Deferred\\_Enforced\\_Departure\\_for\\_Venezuela-Questions\\_and\\_Answers.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/outreach-engagements/Temporary_Protected_Status_and_Deferred_Enforced_Departure_for_Venezuela-Questions_and_Answers.pdf)

## Conclusion

As local government leaders, it is our responsibility to make sure that all of our residents, regardless of country of origin or immigration status, feel safe, and supported. We urge you to provide our communities the resources to care for, welcome, and integrate our new Afghan and Haitian neighbors. Specifically, we ask you to restore the Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program (CHEP), establish categorical parole programs for the vulnerable populations of Afghanistan and Haiti,—many of whom are seeking asylum, a legal and humanitarian right held by all people—and bolster communities and local governments' ability to provide housing and legal services to our new neighbors.

Sincerely,

**Bill de Blasio**, Mayor, New York, New York  
**Lori E. Lightfoot**, Mayor, Chicago, Illinois  
**Todd Gloria**, Mayor, San Diego, California  
**Randall L. Woodfin**, Mayor, Birmingham, Alabama  
**Jesse Arreguín**, Mayor, Berkeley, California  
**Mary Casillas Salas**, Mayor, Chula Vista, California  
**John J. Bauters**, Mayor, Emeryville, California  
**Lily Mei**, Mayor, Fremont, California  
**Libby Schaaf**, Mayor, Oakland, California  
**Lauren Meister**, Mayor, West Hollywood, California  
**Michael B. Hancock**, Mayor, Denver, Colorado  
**Steve Collier**, Mayor, Lawrence, Indiana  
**James Mueller**, Mayor, South Bend, Indiana  
**Michelle Wu**, Mayor, Boston, Massachusetts  
**Joseph A. Curtatone**, Mayor, Somerville, Massachusetts  
**Jacob Frey**, Mayor, Minneapolis, Minnesota  
**Melvin Carter**, Mayor, Saint Paul, Minnesota  
**Steven M. Fulop**, Mayor, Jersey City, New Jersey  
**Timothy Keller**, Mayor, Albuquerque, New Mexico  
**Ted Wheeler**, Mayor, Portland, Oregon  
**James F. Kenney**, Mayor, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
**Steve Adler**, Mayor, Austin, Texas  
**Satya Rhodes-Conway**, Mayor, Madison, Wisconsin  
**Katie Rosenberg**, Mayor, Wausau, Wisconsin  
**Jennifer Gregerson**, Mayor, Mukilteo, Washington  
**Jenny Durkan**, Mayor, Seattle, Washington