



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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**DATE:** October 22, 2024

**05**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### SUBJECT

**AUTHORIZE ACCEPTANCE OF FUNDING FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR AFGHAN REFUGEE SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR UKRAINIANS; AND APPLY FOR FUTURE FUNDING (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### OVERVIEW

In July 2024, the County of San Diego (County), Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities (HSEC), Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) was awarded two additional funding allocations from the California Department of Social Services Refugee Programs Bureau (CDSS RPB) to continue providing supportive services to assist refugees and newly arrived immigrants in the region. Those supportive services include emotional wellness programs, landlord education, housing and utilities assistance, the employment of community health workers, and funding for the Immigrant and Refugee Welcome Center in National City. In addition, HSEC-OIRA will also explore other potential programming based on community feedback received through listening sessions.

Today's action requests the Board authorize actions to accept funds from CDSS RPB for Afghan Refugee Support Services and Housing Assistance for Ukrainians; and authorize to apply for future funding. Today's action advances the County vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, with a special focus on communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically under-resourced, particularly our immigrant and refugee communities. This aligns with our ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities by supporting programs that remove barriers to employment and resources, thereby supporting regional economic inclusion and equity.

### RECOMMENDATION(S)

#### CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Authorize the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Health and Human Services Agency to execute agreements and take any other action necessary as required by the California Department of Social Services Refugee Programs Bureau for the acceptance of \$2,000,000 and any other allocations that may be awarded of Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriation funding for Afghan Refugee Support Services.

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2. Authorize the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Health and Human Services Agency to execute agreements and take any other action necessary as required by the California Department of Social Services Refugee Programs Bureau for acceptance of up to \$1,000,000 and any other allocations that may be awarded of Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act funding for Housing for Ukrainians.
3. Authorize the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, Health and Human Services Agency, or designee, to apply for future funding, including grants, supplemental funding and other funding opportunities for programs or projects in alignment with the goal of expanding the economic inclusion of refugees and immigrants in the region.

### **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

In 2022, approximately 27% of California's 39 million residents are foreign-born. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, this which is the highest percentage of immigrants in any state and more than double the national average of 12%. The United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community, reported nearly 23% of San Diego County's 3.3 million residents are immigrants or foreign-born. San Diego County is one of the most diverse counties in the United States and a leading destination for refugee resettlement and is designated as one of eight refugee-impacted counties, where large populations of refugees reside. From 2012-2024, California has welcomed over 85,000 individuals with refugee status and San Diego County resettled 4,567 newly arrived refugees, making San Diego County the third largest recipient of refugee arrivals in California, behind Sacramento and Los Angeles counties.

As global conflicts continue to displace populations, the region has experienced a significant influx of refugees, notably from Ukraine and Afghanistan, alongside a steady and diverse stream of individuals from various other countries. Between September 2018 and August 2024, San Diego Refugee Resettlement Agencies reported 41% were from Afghanistan. Afghan refugees often settle in locations where they have relatives and in San Diego County, particularly East County, is a popular destination due to the significant Afghan community already residing in the area.

Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian families affected by the war in Ukraine have an official pathway through the Uniting for Ukraine (U4U) program, where U.S. financial sponsors submit applications to support them. Over the past two fiscal years over 5,000 have chosen San Diego as their destination, making San Diego County among the top three resettlement counties for Ukrainians.

The County of San Diego is dedicated to maintaining this role of providing culturally responsive and inclusive services that empower refugees to thrive. This additional funding will enable the continuation of our efforts to meet the evolving needs of our diverse population, helping to ensure that all residents have access to the resources and opportunities they need to succeed.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Today's actions support the County of San Diego (County) Sustainability Goal #1 of engaging the community in meaningful ways, Sustainability Goal #2 of providing just and equitable access to

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services and resources, and Sustainability Goal #4 of protecting the health and well-being of those in the region. The County Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, involves diverse populations in service planning and implementation to ensure that programs are inclusive and responsive to their unique needs. Today's actions would also make essential services such as housing, employment, case management, legal assistance, and public health accessible to all. In addition, such essential services would ultimately protect the health and well-being of those in the region by addressing the public health and housing needs of immigrant and refugee populations and reducing risks of homelessness and unemployment. By accepting the additional funding to support Ukrainians, Afghans, and other immigrant and refugee populations, these actions foster community resilience and equity across the region.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for recommendation one are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 Operational Plan for the Health and Human Services Agency. If approved, this request will result in one-time costs and revenue of \$900,000 in FY 2024-25 and \$1,100,000 in FY 2025-26, for total cost and revenue of \$2,000,000. Costs for FY 2024-25 will be absorbed using existing appropriations. Funds for subsequent years will be incorporated into future operational plans. The funding source is a one-time funding allocation from the California Department of Social Services, Refugee Programs Bureau through the Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

Funds for recommendation two are included in the FY 2024-25 Operational Plan for the Health and Human Services Agency. If approved, this request will result in one-time costs and revenue of \$1,000,000 in FY 2024-25. These costs will be absorbed using existing appropriations. The funding source is a one-time funding allocation from the California Department of Social Services, Refugee Programs Bureau through the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriation Act for Housing for Ukrainians. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

### **ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

### **BACKGROUND**

San Diego County has been designated as a refugee resettlement site by the federal government since 1975 and has been one of the largest resettlement sites in the United States over the last decade. In addition, according to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Refugee Programs Bureau (RPB), San Diego County is among California's designated refugee-impacted counties (where large populations resettle). Historically, programs and services for immigrant and refugee communities have been limited or unavailable because of immigration status.

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Additionally, lack of outreach and community involvement have led to disconnects between enrollment in available services among eligible populations.

On June 8, 2021 (10), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) approved the creation of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHS), Department of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities (HSEC), Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA), to serve as a central hub that connects immigrants and refugees to County services and resources. As the County regional expert on immigrant and refugee issues, HSEC-OIRA collaborates with local communities and Resettlement Agencies to ensure that services are accessible to all, regardless of immigration status. HSEC-OIRA also serves as the County Refugee Coordinator to the State of California. Furthermore, HSEC-OIRA strengthens existing social, health, and self-sufficiency programs, and launches new initiatives to better support and empower the immigrant and refugee community, while actively seeking funding to sustain these efforts.

#### *Afghan Refugee Support Services*

Following the fall of the Taliban in August 2021, thousands of Afghans fled their country, seeking refuge and safety. The United States launched Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) to facilitate the resettlement of Afghan evacuees, including humanitarian parolees, into communities across the country. As one of the nation's top resettlement destinations, San Diego County has received approximately 4,323 Afghan refugees since August 2021. This influx required swift action, leading the County to convene key partners across the region to develop an Afghan Task Force and a coordinated plan to provide support for these individuals and families. The plan was presented to the Board via a memorandum on August 18, 2022. To address the immediate and long-term needs of Afghan refugees, the County and its partners sought funding to implement a range of social programs.

In 2022, as part of the Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Refugee Support Services (RSS), Operation Allies Welcome Afghan arrivals, including humanitarian parolees, began receiving resettlement support, with a focus on addressing housing needs. The Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriation Act (ASA) provided funding to be used for housing, legal and food assistance, as well as extended case management for Afghan families, ensuring stability and successful integration into local communities.

On August 30, 2022 (17), the Board approved the acceptance of \$2.0 million in ASA funding. Subsequently, HSEC-OIRA created and implemented services based on community feedback received from December 2021 to April 2022 from the Afghan Task Force work groups. These services focused on housing, behavioral health, and coordination of social, emotional, cultural, and volunteer efforts. Furthermore, the work groups identified priority areas and submitted recommendations reflecting community needs and potential solutions. The recommendations were shared through the Afghan Response Plan that was submitted to the Board via a memorandum on August 18, 2022. Subsequent, responsive services and programs supported by ASA funding and their outcomes include:

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- *Emotional Wellness and Self-Care Education Program* provided support to the Afghan community in the areas of emotional wellness and self-care education . HSEC-OIRA partnered with County Behavioral Health Services (BHS) to integrate services into an existing BHS contract to provide a culturally and linguistically responsive approach to pilot acculturation lessons to children and families in their native languages of Pashto, Farsi, and Dari. As of July 2024, over 1,800 refugees have participated in the Emotional Wellness and Self-Care Education program. Additionally, a series of 60 educational lessons were delivered to 70 children at Lexington Elementary and Cajon Valley Middle Schools to help with acclimation to life in the United States and navigate new cultural norms, systems, and ways of living as they transition into their new community.
- *Landlord Education Program* provided specialized training to 1,034 housing industry professionals—including landlords, property managers, and others—aimed at addressing common challenges and misconceptions about renting to refugees. This comprehensive program provided insight into the Afghan refugee resettlement process, income sources, and relevant anti-discrimination laws, helping to foster greater empathy and openness among landlords toward renting to Afghan refugees. These trainings took place from September 2023 to July 2024.
- *Community Health Workers (CHWs)* have been instrumental in providing trauma-informed and culturally competent services to the refugee community. They provide social support, build trust, and assist with navigating systems all while providing access to information in multiple languages, including Spanish, Somali, and Arabic. From July 2023 to September 2024, CHWs participated in nearly 500 events across the county, engaging with local communities to provide critical support. Through their participation in outreach and community education events, they have connected approximately 26,000 individuals to essential programs and services. Their participation in more than 40 outreach and community events involving the Afghan community has led to collaboration with the Afghan Community Center to host a listening session to directly hear the needs of that community and provide access and connection to resources. Additionally, the CHWs attend regular health fairs, resource fair, and workshop events in the East region, where majority of the Afghan community reside.
- *Immigrant and Refugee Welcome Center (IRWC)* in the South Region Live Well Center in National City, which opened in March 2023, has been committed to offering a trauma-informed and culturally responsive environment for immigrants and refugees. Co-located with County departments and community partners, the IRWC offers help with referrals and access to services like food, housing, legal support, education, healthcare, and enrollment into benefits such as CalFresh and Medi-Cal. Since inception, the IRWC has assisted nearly 4,000 individuals, with the most requested services being food support, housing and utilities assistance, and legal aid. Additionally, the IRWC serves as a venue for partner organizations to engage with the community and provide specialized support in areas such as immigration legal services.

On July 10, 2024, CDSS RPB awarded the County an additional allocation of \$2.0 million to extend some of these programs and services to continue supporting immigrants and refugees through September 30, 2026. HSEC-OIRA will explore other potential programming based on

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community feedback received during the June 1, 2024, listening session. At this listening session, participants from the Afghan community provided insights that highlighted critical needs such as affordable housing, legal support around tenant's rights and immigration, and employment opportunities in government.

*Housing Assistance for Ukrainians*

When the war in Ukraine began in early 2022, millions of Ukrainians fled their homes, seeking refuge in various countries, including the United States. San Diego County, known for its welcoming approach to refugees, quickly became a destination for many displaced individuals. In response to the growing number of arrivals, local government agencies, along with community partners, mobilized to address the urgent needs of the new arrivals, with housing emerging as one of the top priorities. The County and its partners worked together to explore funding opportunities to support housing solutions and other critical services for Ukrainian refugees. This collaborative effort aimed to ensure that those fleeing the war would find not only safety but also the support necessary to rebuild their lives in San Diego County.

In 2022, CDSS RPB launched the Housing Assistance for Ukrainians (HAU) program under the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriation Act (AUSAA) funding to support recent Ukrainian arrivals and other displaced individuals from Ukraine in securing long-term housing and achieving self-sufficiency. On September 26, 2023 (5), the Board authorized the acceptance of AUSSA funding, including an allocation specifically for the HAU program, which provides housing and utilities assistance. In an effort to provide timely and effective support Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian families impacted by the war, the Board approved, on April 9, 2024 (9), the expansion of HSEC-OIRA's existing Vocational English-as-a-Second Language contracts in the East and Central regions. Since inception of the HAU program, 123 families have received rental assistance and utility assistance through August 2024 in San Diego County. On July 31, 2024, CDSS RPB awarded the County an additional HAU allocation of \$1.0 million, which will be used to provide more families with housing and utilities assistance.

Today's item requests the Board to authorize the acceptance of funding from CDSS RPB for Afghan Refugee Support Services, Housing Assistance for Ukrainians; and authorize to apply for future funding.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's actions support the County of San Diego 2024-2029 Strategic Plan initiatives of Sustainability (Resiliency), Equity (Health and Economic Opportunities), and Community (Engagement), and the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe, and thriving communities. This is accomplished by creating initiatives that reduce and eliminate poverty and promote the value of equity in health and housing, regardless of legal or immigration status.

Respectfully submitted,

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EBONY N. SHELTON  
Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A