

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 31, 2023

Ur Mendoza Jaddou  
Director  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
5900 Capital Gateway Drive  
Camp Springs, Maryland 20588

Dear Director Jaddou,

We write to urge the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to swiftly provide support for asylum-seekers in New York and across the nation by deploying additional USCIS support centers.

We applaud your efforts opening Afghan Support Centers in Arizona and other states, which provide translation services, USCIS services, legal assistance, housing assistance, employment assistance, dental clinics, food assistance, adult education, health screenings, school enrollment and mental health counseling.<sup>1</sup> Access to these humanitarian and legal services is vital to any individual seeking refuge in the United States, and it is critical to respond to all our refugee and asylum-seeking populations with empathy and resources that uplift their humanity and safeguard their basic rights. We stand in solidarity with Afghan refugees, and we also implore you to widen the scope of these centers so that they may reach additional refugee and asylum-seeking populations.

Our domestic and international laws protect asylum-seekers' ability to seek relief once arriving in the United States.<sup>2</sup> It is imperative that we support these populations with necessary wrap-around services while they await their trial dates, as these wait times continue to worsen under the existing Immigration Court backlogs.<sup>3</sup> We applaud USCIS' efforts in broadening Afghan Support Center sites to include centers for Afghan refugees in California, Washington, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, and we request that the scope of these types of centers are broadened to include additional asylum-seeking populations.<sup>4</sup> By widening the scope of these support centers to include additional asylum-seeking populations, the USCIS would help to uphold asylum-seekers' right to due process while addressing the humanitarian needs experienced by these populations.

In addition to broadening the reach of these centers in general, we ask you specifically to open pilot Support Centers with the collaboration of partners in New York City and New York State, focused on aiding our growing asylum-seeking populations, regardless of their country of origin. New York City has processed over 93,200 asylum seekers since Spring 2022. Currently

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<sup>1</sup> USCIS; <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/flyers/Afghan-Support-Center-Phoenix.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 8 USC § 1158

<sup>3</sup> Straut-Eppsteiner, Holly. *U.S. Immigration Courts and the Pending Cases Backlog - CRS Reports*, [crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47077](https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47077). Accessed 18 July 2023.

<sup>4</sup> USCIS; [www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-updates-medical-examination-guidance-for-afghan-parolees-arriving-under-operation-allies](https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-updates-medical-examination-guidance-for-afghan-parolees-arriving-under-operation-allies)

56,200 asylum seekers are in the city's care.<sup>5</sup> The city continues to welcome thousands of asylum seekers each week. We remain committed, as New York legislators, to welcoming and supporting the asylum-seekers coming to our state. In order to successfully provide these humanitarian services, New York must draw on the organizational capacity and resources of the Federal Government. USCIS Support Centers would be an enormously significant step towards providing much needed wrap-around services to our asylum-seeking communities. We strongly urge you to expand Support Centers in general and to open some in our state, and we look forward to partnering with you on this effort.

Sincerely,



Jamaal Bowman, Ed.D.  
Member of Congress



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress



Dan Goldman  
Member of Congress



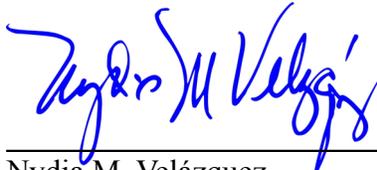
Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress



Grace Meng  
Member of Congress



Gregory W. Meeks  
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress

<sup>5</sup> Donaldson, Sahalie. "Following the Asylum-Seeker Odyssey: A Timeline." *City & State NY*, 23 May 2023, [www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2023/05/following-asylum-seeker-odyssey/382850/](http://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2023/05/following-asylum-seeker-odyssey/382850/).



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

October 4, 2023

The Honorable Jamaal Bowman  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bowman:

Thank you for your July 31, 2023 letter requesting that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) expand support centers to New York State to provide wraparound services to all asylum seekers. USCIS is committed to strengthening our outreach to our stakeholder communities and will consider your suggestion.

As a predominantly fee-funded agency, USCIS allocates 96 percent of costs to fee-paying applicants and petitioners in an effort to ensure that the agency can fully recover its operating costs. USCIS, as expressly contemplated by statute, provides certain services without requiring a fee, primarily immigration benefits for refugee and asylum seekers. However, Afghan Support Centers operate out of a critical Operations Allies Welcome (OAW) Congressional appropriation provided to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including Afghan Integration and Support Efforts, which DHS, and by extension USCIS, leads.

Other USCIS activities similar to Afghan Support Centers are not currently funded by Congress. Instead, the only funds available for this would be to shift funds collected for processing requests from fee-paying petitioners and applicants seeking immigration and naturalization benefits, such as family- and employment-based immigration, among others. As you may know, USCIS is operating from fees that were established in December of Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, which presents significant challenges operating in and paying for FY 2023 costs, including growing asylum cases and associated employment authorizations that are done without fee. Given these funding constraints coupled with growing humanitarian workloads, USCIS does not have the resources, both staff and funding, to cover these growing costs, let alone fund clinics as we do for Afghans that are funded from Congressional appropriations. USCIS is a willing and able organization to run these types of clinics, but we need appropriations from Congress to do so.

Despite these fiscal challenges, USCIS does have local Community Relations Specialists throughout the country who hold a variety of external stakeholder events in which we share

information and obtain feedback on USCIS programs, policies, and initiatives. For information on contacting the USCIS Community Relations Specialists for a particular area in the country, please visit the USCIS Community Relations Specialists website at:

<https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship-resource-center/outreach-tools/learn-about-the-civics-and-citizenship-toolkit/uscis-community-relations-specialists>.

USCIS is grateful for previous Congressional appropriations for Afghan Support Centers, \$193 million for processing various immigration and asylum petitions and applications to support Operation Allies Welcome, \$275 million for backlog reduction and refugee processing efforts in FY 2022, for the support provided to our refugee and international operations programs in FY 2023, as well as the citizenship and integration grant program. While this funding has assisted USCIS, it is a very small percentage of the growing humanitarian work USCIS does without Congressional appropriations. USCIS needs continued appropriations to meet requests for humanitarian benefits without shifting even more costs from fee-paying applicants and petitioners. The President has requested funding for USCIS in the FY 2024 Budget (\$264 million to continue backlog reduction efforts, \$137 million to continue refugee, parole, and international operations, and \$342 million to handle the processing of asylum adjudications, credible fear screenings, and asylum merit interviews). Such appropriated funding would be the primary source of funding for the USCIS humanitarian mission. These appropriations are crucial in delivering our mission, turning the tide on backlogs, and achieving greater efficiencies throughout the agency. As USCIS' humanitarian mission continues to grow, Congressional support is essential to ensuring we can carry out that mission without negatively impacting our other work or our fiscal sustainability.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. The cosigners of your letter will receive a separate, identical response. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ur M. Jaddou  
Director