

For Immediate Release
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Statement by Russell Smith, LMSW, CEO of Refugee Services of Texas, on RST's role in Resettling Afghan Families who Have Assisted the U.S. Military

In the wake of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, thousands of Afghan nationals and their family members who gave everything to help the American military have now found themselves in grave danger.

Refugee Services of Texas is working with our national refugee resettlement partners and the U.S. government to offer protection and resettlement opportunities to these brave Afghans and their families.

Afghan nationals who cooperated with the U.S. military are in a highly volatile and dangerous situation as the Taliban overruns the country. We have an obligation as Americans to support those who gave everything to help our nation, and we must act now to ensure these refugees are evacuated and transported to safety.

Reports suggest 30,000 Afghans may be resettled in the US in the coming weeks, and many will be temporarily housed at Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas. The incoming Afghans have applied for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), which will qualify them to be resettled by Refugee Services of Texas and other resettlement agencies across the nation. The US has previously resettled thousands of SIV holders to keep its promise to protect those who have given everything to help our nation, and we must make good on those promises once again.

Every year, Special Immigrant Visa recipients represent a large percentage of the forcibly displaced individuals we serve. Refugee Services of Texas has welcomed over 2,400 SIV's from Afghanistan and Iraq since 2010. Each year, we assist 35-40% of the SIV's who resettle in Texas, and 4-6% of all SIV's who come to the US.

All Afghans who have applied for Special Immigrant Visas (SIVS) will undergo security background checks and health screenings.

Refugee Services of Texas is closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan and lending support wherever we can. We stand ready, willing, and able to work with our national resettlement partners, elected representatives, and the military to process and resettle as many people as

possible. A valued staff member in our Dallas office is answering the call to deploy to Fort Lee and help with the newly arrived individuals and families.

Currently, Refugee Services of Texas has been assured that it will settle 324 Afghans in the next few weeks across our offices in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and Austin. Over the weekend, the Austin office of Refugee Services of Texas resettled a family of seven, and is gearing up to welcome four additional families this week. We know that this is just the beginning of this wave, and RST stands ready to do our part in this crisis.

For more than four decades, Refugee Services of Texas has resettled refugees, asylees, and SIVs fleeing life-threatening situations, from the days of Vietnam to the present situation in Afghanistan. We are prepared to step in once again for the sake of the world's most vulnerable populations, to lock arms with the people of Texas in this humanitarian mission, and to welcome those who are relying on our swift actions to find peace and safety in a new land.

We are proud of the tireless support we receive from volunteers – Texans who have been a welcoming presence for decades as thousands of refugees from around the world find their new home in one of the friendliest and most accommodating places on earth, the Lone Star State. I am confident that Texans will once again step up and welcome these vulnerable families to our shores.

RST needs the public's support in resettling the brave Afghans and their families who are now paying the price of giving our country and our military so much. Support RST's work in resettling SIVs at <https://www.rstx.org/make-an-impact/>

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