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For Immediate Release

## Iowa HHS Expands Support for Refugees

### ANNOUNCES REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS AND OTHER KEY INITIATIVES

(Des Moines, IA) The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (Iowa HHS) is in the process of significant organizational change. In response to the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iowa HHS began restructuring the Bureau of Refugee Services (BRS) in January of 2022 to better meet the needs of refugees and the community partners that support them. Iowa HHS has been working diligently over the past several months to identify and address gaps to better support refugees who now call Iowa home.

Most initial placement and resettlement supports for refugees are provided by community partners and resettlement agencies. Because of the pace and volume of Afghan arrivals, our community partners faced challenges in this effort. Additionally, the supports they provide is time limited. To ensure newly arrived refugees in Iowa have the supports they need to succeed and become self-sufficient, Iowa HHS is deploying a multipronged approach.

#### **Request for Proposal (RFP) for Wraparound Community Supports**

Today, Iowa HHS announced an RFP seeking ethnic, community or faith-based organizations to provide critical wraparound supports and services to refugees in Iowa. Examples of these services and supports may include community integration, English proficiency, digital literacy, banking and financial planning, transportation, health and wellness, services for older refugees and youth supports. This will help to ensure the long-term success of newly arrived refugees in Iowa.

You can find more information on the Refugee Services RFP REF-24-001 at <https://bidopportunities.iowa.gov/Home/BidInfo?bidId=95bb1c86-9c09-4b64-a6f2-6fc23055ec03>

#### **Partnership with Other State Departments**

Iowa HHS has worked closely with Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) and the Iowa Finance Authority (IFA) to support the workforce and housing needs of refugees. IWD now has a dedicated refugee support unit that works with clients served by the Resettlement Agencies as well as those enrolled in Promise Jobs. This includes a dedicated position that is shared between IWD and BRS to navigate workforce needs with a goal of employing refugees at the top of their skill set. This also establishes a relationship between refugees and IWD for resources and ongoing needs.

Similarly, we've created a new position that is shared between IFA and BRS to navigate housing needs. As a result of this partnership, Iowa is one of a handful of states to utilize emergency rental assistance (ERA) to support refugee housing needs. Through this partnership we've distributed more than \$3 million in rental assistance to refugees.

### **New Office for the Bureau of Refugee Services**

Community orientation and assistance in learning about customs and norms in a new society were critical needs identified in our meetings with refugees. This summer BRS moved to a new location, which includes space for community orientation, education, and training. Iowa HHS is hiring a new position to focus on community orientation and programming for refugees in the new space. The new space is welcoming and will serve as a hub for refugee supports and will also be available to community partners who support refugees.

### **Connection to Other Vital Resources**

Internet access is essential to apply for services, find and identify resources, pay bills, learn English, and complete schoolwork. To support these self-sufficiency activities, Iowa HHS partnered with T-Mobile to provide recently arrived refugees with hotspots for internet access.

Iowa HHS also launched a new legal services partnership. We've contracted with the University of Iowa College of Law, in partnership with Drake University Law School and Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice, to develop legal clinics to support the needs of Afghan refugees. This includes providing much needed legal services to assist with paperwork, applications, and other processes to help them toward self-sufficiency in Iowa. This partnership will help address challenges related to lack of documentation, which can be a barrier to joining the workforce. It also provides a great opportunity for students who are studying law in Iowa.

"While there were challenges with the speed and volume of the arrival of Afghan refugees, the work we're doing to ensure Iowa continues its long-standing track record of being a welcoming and supportive state for refugees is exciting," said Matt Highland, Chief of Strategic Operations. "There is still a lot of work to do, but all of these efforts are laying a solid foundation to support refugees who've recently arrived in Iowa, and those to come in the future."

"Education, accessibility and opportunity are key factors to successful integration of refugees into their new communities," said Mak Sucaska. "These supports will create a sustainable infrastructure to serve refugees across the state, and to promote a spirit of collaboration and support for all refugees who call Iowa home"

You can find Iowa HHS job postings <https://dhs.iowa.gov/nowhiring>

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Media Contact:  
Alex Carfrae  
acarfra@dhs.state.ia.us