

PO Box 21:
NH Helps Immigrants
February 2021



Biden Turns the Page on Immigration

Almost immediately after President Biden was sworn into office, he went to work signing dozens of executive orders. Included in this collection were efforts to protect and aid refugees, asylum seekers and the undocumented in the United States. Most of these executive orders were undoing efforts by the previous administration to lessen human right needs. “No human is illegal.” Below is a summary of his start.

1. President Biden has lifted the ban for travel to the US from 12 primarily Muslim countries. They include Nigeria, Eritrea, Sudan, Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen.
2. He has signed an order to find and reunite the children separated at the Mexican border from their parents. Additionally, he has cancelled the aggressive hunting and deporting of unauthorized individuals in the US and ceased the deportation of Liberians living in the US.
3. The construction of the Mexican-American border wall has been halted.
4. The children of DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, is again protected. This executive order also asks Congress to find the path for permanent status and a means to citizenship for these immigrant children.
5. Finally, noncitizens will again be included in the US census counting.

While these executive orders are a stop gap measure, they are a humane start.

What Do Biden’s Actions Mean for NH?

PO Box 21 board members and our friends in other refugee assistance groups across New Hampshire are monitoring President Biden’s executive orders closely. We cannot be sure yet what these changes in immigration policy will mean for us but we have a few guesses, including:

1. The number of asylum seekers who are detained in the Strafford County Jail may drop, reducing the need for weekly visits by Nancy Pape’s team of legal assistants and translators. The jail is currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic. If fewer

people are detained in the future, how will we contact people who still need housing and other assistance?

2. The numbers of asylum-seekers may increase significantly as Biden changes policies at the Mexican and Canadian borders. These refugees have little or no social or financial support. However, Biden may reduce the waiting periods for work papers and ICE hearings. Trump increased deportations and doubled waiting periods for work papers.
3. Many of Trump's executive orders can be changed immediately. But others will need time for public comment and implementation. Many measures concerning asylum are in the latter category. Meanwhile, Trump appointed judges will remain and they are likely to continue to deal severely with the asylum-seekers.
4. Large numbers of refugees will be resettled in the U.S. now by the United Nations. For example, many Syrians from refugee camps in Lebanon and Turkey had already been vetted for settlement in the States before Trump took office. Those people have been stuck in the camps for four years but may now begin to arrive here. These refugees will receive extensive support from the State Dept. and state agencies.
5. As Biden brings the U.S. back into the Paris climate change accords, millions of people displaced by rising seas, extreme drought, forest fires and other climate change problems may begin to dream of coming to the United States.

What Can We Do?

Specific planning may have to wait a bit. In the meantime, every person associated with PO Box 21 can help. Here's how:

1. Educate your friends and neighbors so they won't be afraid of refugees and immigrants. Talk about our nation's immigrant cultural history. Introduce them to an immigrant or refugee you are helping. Talk about immigrant contributions to our economy and culture.
2. Join a host family group in your area. Over the past three or four years, host family groups have developed all over New Hampshire. Keene has a very active group that has brought families from the Mexican border here. The Upper Valley group is working across the Connecticut in both NH and Vermont. Nashua and Manchester both have host family teams. The Seacoast are continues to be a center for helping many people. Here in the Lakes Region and Coos County, a few individuals and families have hosted single refugees. We may need housing for families soon. Contact us if you would like to know more.
3. Affordable housing, jobs and mass transportation are going to be needed for families and large numbers of refugees. Large housing units at affordable prices are almost impossible to find in NH's urban areas. Big drafty houses exist out here in Sandwich and in other rural towns. But we have few jobs and poor transportation. Yet, look around. Migrant workers and immigrants are living here, perhaps living under the radar. But they are here. If you have a big house or if you need housekeepers or landscape workers or carpenters, let's put our heads together and build a welcoming community for new Americans.

Five Students in School

- Mamadou D. is taking a second semester of freshman classes at Great Bay Community College. He is completing applications to colleges with pre-med programs. His first choice is Dartmouth.
- Claudine M., a legal aid who escaped from Cameroon, is finishing the last class she needs to become an American paralegal. Claudine recently met with Congressman Chris Pappas to explain the crisis in Cameroon.
- E.M.N., also from Cameroon, a trained computer expert, is enrolled in the Amazon Web Services architecture certificate at UNH. He has been active in helping to protect other Cameroonian asylum seekers from deportation.
- Noreen Tr., our beloved friend from Uganda, is taking another class in respiratory therapy at River Valley Community College, part of the UNH system.
- Fernando Rodriguez Luna is enrolled in the spring semester at Central Piedmont College in North Carolina. His father Carlos was hosted here in NH.
- Kids to camp. We're waiting to hear if Camp Hale and a Dover day camp will open this summer. Four children want to go to camp!

And, good news! Eunice Ngobese obtained her certified nurse's assistant license and then her licensed practical nurse training with help from PO Box 21. Now Eunice is working fulltime as an LPN and studying for her Registered Nurse license. She was just accepted to the Riviere University program. Way to go, Eunice!

Donations Appreciated

Generous gifts continue to arrive in the PO Box 21 mail box in Center Sandwich. Thank you! PO Box 21 will continue to offer tuition assistance to asylum seekers and other refugees who want to study while they wait for work papers or as they improve their job skills. In every case, we learn that much of what we do helps refugees lay the groundwork for successful studying. That may include eye glasses, transportation, uniforms, and many other items and issues. PO Box 21 opens the doors to school for our new friends.

Board Members

The members of the board of directors of PO Box 21 include Martha Carlson, chair, Rebecca Sinkler, Heidi Rowe, Dan Kusch, and Lenore Higgins, treasurer. Contact any of us if you'd like to chat about our program or to volunteer to help.