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National Network
for Arab American Communities
An ACCESS Institution

TAKE ON HATE

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Biden's First 100 Days: Evaluating His Plan for Partnership with Arab Americans

As the Biden administration rounds out its First 100 Days, ACCESS is taking stock of the Biden campaign's promises to the Arab American community, which they detailed in their "[Plan for Partnership](#)." The following will provide a status update of the nascent Biden administration in these areas, organized with respect to ACCESS' policy priorities for this year. Each section will provide points on which ACCESS encourages deeper engagement on behalf of the Arab American and broader MENA community.

Economic Opportunity and Community Development

The Biden administration promised to "support the creation of a new Middle East North Africa (MENA) category...so that Arab Americans can be more fairly counted, and their needs studied and considered alongside other minorities." On their first day, the Biden administration issued [an Executive Order](#) to "[advance] racial equity and support for underserved communities through the Federal government," but excluded the Arab American and MENA community from their Domestic Policy Council's "efforts to embed equity principles, policies, and approaches across the Federal Government." Pursuant to section 8 of the Executive Order, which authorizes agencies to "consult with members of communities that have been historically underrepresented in the Federal Government and underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs," ACCESS encourages the Executive Branch to explicitly include the Arab American and broader MENA community in their institutional approaches to racial equity, through the Office of Minority Health, the Census Bureau, and the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) program, among other programs.

The Biden administration promised to "spur public-private investment through a small business opportunity plan that will fund successful state and local investment initiatives and make permanent the highly effective New Markets Tax Credit." The American Rescue Plan allocated \$1.5 billion to State programs authorized through the State Small Business Credit Initiative Act, which directs funds toward "[socially and economically disadvantaged individuals](#)," a legal classification from which Arab Americans are definitionally and effectively excluded from. Additionally, the Treasury Department under President Biden invested \$9 billion through a new Emergency Capital Investment Program and \$3 billion for the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which also exclude Arab Americans from the list of racial and ethnic minority groups to whom they target resources. The Biden administration can jointly a) facilitate inclusion of a MENA category within the list of racial and ethnic minority groups at the agency level and b) support legislation that would amend section 308 of the Financial Institutions, Reform, and Recovery, and Enforcement Act (FIRREA) to include MENA among the list of racial and ethnic minority groups.

Rejecting Hate, Protecting Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

The Biden campaign promised to "directly address the rise in hateful attacks, fix long-standing issues with how the government documents hate crimes, and enact legislation prohibiting someone convicted of a hate crime from purchasing or possessing a firearm." The Biden administration has thrown their support behind [the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act](#), on which the *Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act* was included as an amendment. The COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act passed resoundingly in the Senate and will likely pass the House upon consideration. Upon Senate passage, ACCESS issued a press release calling for Congress to follow up on this bill with additional steps to "directly address antagonisms between people in their local contexts" and to engage the "other factors which contribute to social stratification and persistent bias in local contexts," including income inequality and rent-intensifying real estate development.

The Biden campaign promised to “update section 4 of the Voting Rights Act,” “develop a new process for pre-clearing election changes,” and “ensure that the Justice Department challenges state laws suppressing the right to vote. To that point, the Justice Department under President Biden has already [reviewed](#) state laws affecting the right to vote. **The Biden campaign promised to “root out systemic racism across our laws and institutions, including in policing.”** To that end, ACCESS encourages the Biden campaign to reconsider the \$20 million in discretionary spending they requested for the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (TVTP) program. Just as the Biden administration has promised to “condition federal funding on [police] departments undertaking reforms,” ACCESS encourages the Biden administration to condition TVTP funding on the DHS undertaking reforms of its prevention approach, which is ineffective and relies upon [“overbroad and unproven criteria to label people dangerous and worthy of suspicion.”](#)

The Biden campaign promised to “instruct the Department of Homeland Security to undertake a review of ‘watchlist’ and ‘no-fly list’ processes to ensure that they do not have an adverse impact on individuals or groups based on national origin, race, religion or ethnicity, and improve the process to remove names, when justified, from these lists.” To that end, ACCESS encourages the Biden administration to support, with action, a) the efforts of community-based organizations to work with DHS to produce and promulgate a clear process for removing names from the “watchlist” and no-fly list” and b) legislation that would impose nonpartisan oversight of the process by which individuals are placed on both the ‘watchlist’ and the ‘no-fly list.’

Building a Care-Based Social Infrastructure

The Biden campaign promised to “ensure everyone has access to free COVID-19 testing, treatment, and a safe and effective vaccine, when one is available.” They have delivered on the promise of vaccine access, and must now ensure that Arab American community-based organizations and social service agencies have the resources they need to develop vaccine education campaigns for their clients, many of whom express hesitancy in taking the vaccine. To best assess the inclusiveness of their COVID-19 treatment and testing efforts, the Biden administration should support establishment of a MENA category within their Federal demographic data collection and reporting standards.

The Biden campaign promised to “ensure and expand protections for students against bullying, violence, and discrimination in schools”, “work with states to offer pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds,” “make public colleges and universities tuition-free for all students whose family incomes are below \$125,000,” “invest in, and allow, Pell Grants to be used for dual-enrollment programs,” and “build on the Affordable Care Act” through “more choice” and “lowering the [Medicare] eligibility age to 60,” among other things. The [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP) provided emergency relief to several programs germane to ACCESS’ vision of a care-based social infrastructure, but the real test of lasting change will be the [American Families Plan](#), a \$1.8 trillion proposal which extends key aspects of the ARP and follows through on several of the aforementioned promises.

Citizenship and Integration for Immigrants

President Biden promised to “rescind the un-American Muslim travel and refugee bans” and to “cease the immoral family separation policy.” On his first day in office, President Biden [issued](#) a proclamation on ending discriminatory bans on entry to the United States. Earlier this month, the Democrat-controlled House passed the *NO BAN Act*, which would require future Presidents to provide a basis of evidence for future immigration bans and also include religious discrimination among the nondiscrimination conditions of Federal immigration policy. These are significant steps taken to oppose and prevent repeat instances of racist immigration policy.

President Biden [promised](#) to work toward “setting the annual global refugee admissions cap” at 125,000. However, his team cautioned that they would “need to “raise it over time commensurate with our responsibility, our values, and the unprecedented global need.” Within a few weeks, President Biden had signed a new Executive Order “on rebuilding and enhancing programs to resettle refugees.” By initially setting the cap at 15,000, the all-time low set by the Trump administration, the Biden administration made an early determination on his view of our national responsibility to immigrants, values as a diverse nation, as well as the unprecedented need of the more than the need conveyed a determination that the cap at 62,500. They have since [backtracked](#), and intend to set a new cap. ACCESS encourages the Biden administration to set the maximum cap for refugee admissions at the 125,000 figure and increase funding to reception, resettlement, and integration programs.

The Biden campaign promised to “put real political capital into passing legislative immigration reform that provides a roadmap to citizenship for nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants enriching our communities.” On his first day in office, President Biden [sent](#) to Congress the *U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021*, a bill that would establish a pathway to citizenship for lawful prospective immigrants, Dreamers, and holders of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). In his Joint Address to Congress, President Biden [called](#) upon the legislative branch to pass immigration reform legislation, whether his *U.S. Citizenship Act* or [H.R.6](#), the *American Dream and Promise Act*, or [H.R.1603](#), the *Farm Workforce Modernization Act*.

The Biden campaign promised to “reverse Trump’s public charge rule”, which they promptly did through the Judiciary branch. However, more is to be done to avoid a repeat of the “[chilling effect](#),” which refers to the effect of Trump’s immigration policy on many immigrant families’ decision to not access the public benefits to which they are entitled. During the pandemic, the “[chilling effect](#)” persisted in many districts, which further exacerbated the health and economic hardships associated with the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. ACCESS encourages the DHS to: produce renewed field guidance on the public charge rule; ensure the field guidance expresses the sense of the Biden administration that America is a “land of opportunity that is open and welcoming to all, not just the wealthy”; develop culturally and linguistically appropriate educational materials for community-based organizations (CBOs); and appropriate the necessary funds for CBOs to promulgate these materials to immigrant beneficiaries.

The Biden campaign promised to ensure “that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel abide by professional standards and are held accountable for inhumane treatment of individuals.” To that point, the DHS under President Biden has instructed ICE and CBP to stop using terminology such as “alien” or “illegal alien.” They have also [placed](#) upon ICE and CBP “new limits on civil immigration enforcement actions in or near courthouses.” ACCESS encourages the DHS to produce and promulgate field guidance on this new rule change, which still relies upon ambiguous language, such as the condition that law enforcement can be taken against an immigrant whose case is a “national security matter.” In addition, ACCESS encourages follow-up from the administration on the “rampant abuse and unchecked culture of impunity within ICE and CBP” detailed in the National Immigration Project report: “[Complaints Ignored, Abuses Excused: Why the Department of Homeland Security’s Internal Accountability Mechanisms Must Be Reformed.](#)”

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ABOUT ACCESS

Grounded in a grassroots commitment to empowerment, ACCESS is the largest Arab American community nonprofit in the U.S., with a 50-year history of nonprofit excellence. Guided by our vision of a just and equitable society for all, with the full participation of Arab Americans, we empower communities in Southeast Michigan to improve their economic, social and cultural well-being through an extensive network of health, education, employment and social services programming. Our mission extends nationally through our highly esteemed institutions—The National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC), the Arab American National Museum (AANM) and the Center for Arab American Philanthropy (CAAP)—which are focused on making an impact through advocacy, the arts and philanthropy.

ABOUT NNAAC

The National Network for Arab American Communities (NNAAC), an institution of ACCESS, is a growing network of independent Arab American community-based organizations around the country. Established in 2004, NNAAC currently has 27 members in 12 states. The strength of these member organizations is built around the grassroots constituencies they serve through a range of programs, outreach and advocacy. NNAAC’s primary mission is to build the capacity of Arab American nonprofit organizations that focus on the needs and issues impacting their local community while collectively addressing those issues nationally. To support its mission, NNAAC has three main programs: Capacity Building, Advocacy and Civic Engagement (ACE), and Youth and Community Service.

ABOUT TAKE ON HATE

Take on Hate, a national campaign of ACCESS, addresses bigotry and discrimination, particularly toward Arab and Muslim Americans, and stands against hate toward all people. Through grassroots organizing, we challenge this country's growing prejudice and persistent misconception of Arab and Muslim Americans, including refugees. For more information, visit www.takeonhate.org.