

In early June, I had the rare opportunity to join Refugee Council USA (RCUSA) Advocacy Days with the support of the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS).

Over those days, I met with congressional staff and members to discuss the issues facing the Iranian and Iranian American community, drawing on research and findings from my work at the Iranian American Legal Defense Fund (IALDF). Key advocacy priorities included ending Operation Post-Admission Refugee Reverification and Integrity Strengthening (PARRIS), restoring the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), reining in ICE and CBP abuses, and advancing legislation that upholds due process and humanitarian protections.

What stayed with me most was the people. I was especially grateful to meet other displaced individuals working in similar fields, and to connect with Afghan refugee leaders — so many of the challenges facing the Iranian American and Afghan American communities overlap. I had the chance to connect with different attorneys working on similar issues and now I see myself being part of a larger community of displaced advocates.

On a personal note: I had never set foot on the Hill before. As an ex-asylum seeker who cannot vote, I never imagined it as a space where I belonged, let alone one where I could engage in advocacy. But through this experience, I learned that my story itself can be a tool for political change. I am beyond grateful for the chance to bring these stories and data directly to the Hill, and I cannot wait to be back again next year!