

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 18, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to you today to express our support and commitment to the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program for Afghans. This critical program has already brought to the United States over 15,500 Afghans who served with bravery and honor alongside United States troops in support of the U.S. missions in Afghanistan. We ask that the Biden Administration continue the longstanding support for these individuals and undertake the steps necessary to uphold the integrity of the program.

Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, the U.S. has been operating on the ground in Afghanistan with the support of Afghan civilians. Not only have these Afghans supported the military and diplomatic efforts of the United States, they have saved the lives of U.S. service members and diplomatic personnel. Because of this work and their association to the United States, they have faced threats to their lives and the lives of their families. The Special Immigrant Visa program was established to provide a well-vetted pathway to safety for these Afghans and allows the U.S. to fulfill its commitment to those who put themselves at risk.

We are deeply concerned about the fate of these individuals after the departure of U.S. troops. There are already reports of Taliban threats targeting those who helped the U.S. once troops are withdrawn. These threats cannot be ignored. As Afghans face renewed security concerns due to their work with the U.S., we must ensure that the SIV program has the capacity to bring them to safety.

In order to best protect the Afghans whose lives remain at risk, we have identified the following areas where we would like to work with your Administration to best support the SIV program:

1. The authorization of at least 20,000 additional visas for fiscal year (FY) 2022 to begin to account for the individuals who are at risk of retaliation for their work in support of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. While this would be an increase over previous years, it is necessary to do all that we can in support of the program while the U.S. has the in-country capacity to do so;
2. Review of the SIV program's process and capacity, as required in the Executive Order on Rebuilding and Enhancing Programs to Resettle Refugees and Planning for the Impact of Climate Change on Migration;
3. Address the backlog of applications that has left Afghan applicants languishing in a dangerous limbo;
4. Build and expand the existing infrastructure necessary for the remote processing of SIVs;
5. Evaluate the application process through Embassy Kabul's Chief of Mission and review the paperwork burden and documentary requirements that slow application adjudication;
6. Encourage and facilitate the involvement of our intelligence agencies and special operations community to advance the cases of those Afghans who supported US actions in a clandestine manner; and

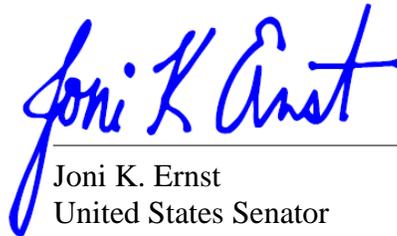
7. Review and consider options to evacuate to a safer location SIV applicants with pending applications who may face extreme danger in Afghanistan until the adjudication of their applications.

We echo the sentiments of the late Senator John McCain when he said that “it would be unconscionable to abandon these brave individuals who are now in danger for their service to the United States’ mission in Afghanistan.” Applicants to the SIV program have put their lives on the line to assist our military and diplomatic personnel. We must now do all that we can to protect and assist them.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

/S/Patrick Leahy
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator

/S/Roger Wicker
Roger Wicker
United States Senator

/S/Richard J. Durbin
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/S/Ron Johnson
Ron Johnson
United States Senator

/S/ Jack Reed
Jack Reed
United States Senator

/S/ M. Michael Rounds
M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator

/S/ Robert Menendez
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United States Senator

/S/ Cynthia Lummis
Cynthia Lummis
United States Senator

/S/ Kirsten Gillibrand
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/S/ Lindsey O. Graham
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United States Senator

/S/ Angus S. King, Jr.
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/S/ Dan Sullivan
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/S/ Christopher A. Coons
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/S/ Benjamin L. Cardin
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United States Senator

/S/ Raphael Warnock
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

/S/ Brian Schatz
Brian Schatz
United States Senator

/S/ Chris Van Hollen
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/S/ Tim Kaine
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CC:

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