

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 25, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

As the situation on the ground in Afghanistan becomes more dangerous, thousands of Afghans are desperately seeking to leave the country to avoid possible persecution. We fully support efforts to provide humanitarian protection to those Afghan nationals in need, however, we write to draw your attention to the possibility that there are many nationals from Afghanistan in the family and employment-based immigration system for whom a visa is not yet available due to visa caps in immigration law. We urge you to expeditiously determine whether such Afghan nationals are in fact in any such backlogs, and if so, explore the use of parole to facilitate entry for that likely small population in order to reunite families and save lives amidst this humanitarian crisis. Every option to save human life should be on the table, including this prudent proposal, which could result in the immediate reunification of families and come at little cost to the government, since sponsoring family members assume responsibility for the foreign national.

The Immigration and Nationality Act allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to grant parole for humanitarian reason or significant public benefits to any person applying for admission to the United States. Previous Administrations have acted on this authority in order to provide relief to certain individuals at a time of pressing humanitarian need. For example, in 2014 the Obama Administration started the Haitian Family Reunification Parole Program, which allowed family members of certain U.S. citizens and green card holders to be extended parole and come to the United States before their immigration visa priority dates were current. In 2010 the Obama Administration also created a parole program for children orphaned as a result of the earthquake in Haiti. In addition, the United States used parole authority during the 1994 Cuban Migration Crisis and during the 1957 Hungarian Revolution.

As we have all seen over the past few days, the situation in Afghanistan is dire and deteriorating rapidly. Civilian casualties in the first half of the year were 47% higher than 2020 and 360,000 have fled their homes with more 30,000 leaving each day. Within the country there are 18 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. With the Taliban takeover and collapse of the Afghan government, the situation will undoubtedly get even worse.

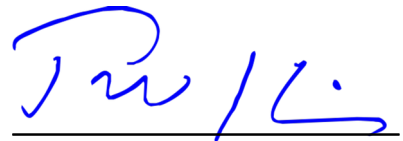
In this context, the United States has a moral obligation to provide assistance to expedite the evacuation of Afghans at risk. Individuals with approved visa petitions have already completed

multiple steps of the immigration process and are merely waiting for a visa to become available. We ask that you expeditiously determine whether any such Afghan nationals are in any backlog, and use the authority accorded to you by law to facilitate the immediate evacuation of this at-risk population to the United States.

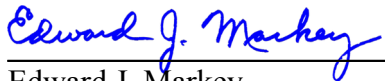
Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



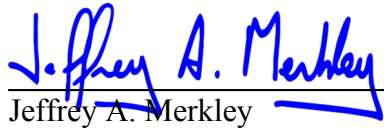
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



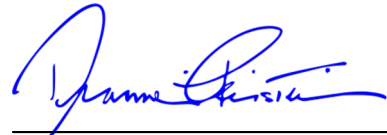
Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



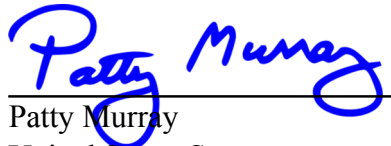
Raphael G. Warnock
United States Senator



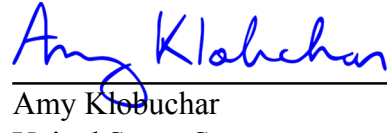
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



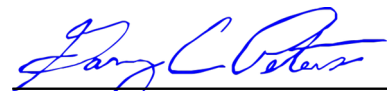
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



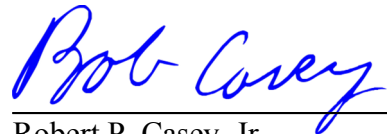
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



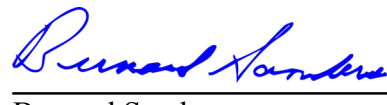
Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



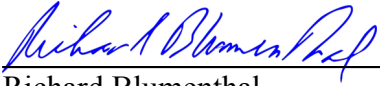
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



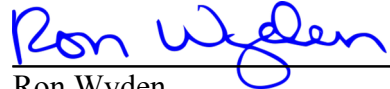
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



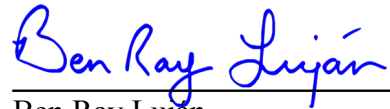
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator