

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

October 4, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
U.S. Department of Defense
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Secretary Austin,

Today, as many as 65,000 Afghan evacuees flown out of Afghanistan under the President's orders now reside across eight military bases in the United States.¹ The Biden Administration's security vetting procedures to clear Afghans entering the country remain unclear and incomplete, and, unless changed, are insufficient to preserve the safety of the American homeland.

We are concerned the hastily developed process creates gaps in security and criminal vetting and risks our Nation's security. We urge that you pause relocating any more Afghan evacuees to the United States, except for fully-vetted Afghans holding Special Immigration Visas, and complete all appropriate vetting procedures at safe locations abroad. We further ask that you pause resettlement of Afghans already paroled into the United States until the Department of Defense Inspector General verifies that DOD is appropriately managing and tracking evacuees through the biometrics enrollment, screening, and vetting process.

Afghans selected to board American military planes in Kabul did not complete the long-established interagency vetting processes shared across the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration and the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Instead, much of the vetting is occurring on military bases on U.S. soil.² Furthermore, the State Department's inability to facilitate or process SIV applicants on-ground, those that aided American operations in Afghanistan, fails our partners and breaks promises made to those who put themselves and their families at significant risk to aid U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

The cracks in the Administration's plan are beginning to show. The USNORTHCOM Commander, GEN VanHerck, clarified in early September that the "vast majority" of Afghans currently housed on U.S. military bases are general refugees, not vetted and trusted applicants

¹ Michelle Hackman, *Afghan Refugees in the U.S.: How They're Vetted, Where They're Going and How to Help*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Sep. 15, 2021, 7:23 p.m.), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghan-refugees-in-the-u-s-how-theyre-vetted-where-theyre-going-and-how-to-help-11630677004>

² Alison Sider, Michelle Hackman, & Alexa Corse, *Afghanistan Evacuation Effort Causes Bottleneck at Dulles Airport*, WALL STREET JOURNAL (Aug. 26, 2021, 5:54 p.m.), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghanistan-evacuation-effort-sparks-bottleneck-at-dulles-airport-11629997393>.

admitted under the SIV program.³ In addition, a number of Afghan evacuees have already been flagged for terrorist ties after entry into the United States.⁴ As a result, the Inspector General for the Department of Defense was forced to evaluate the screening of displaced persons from Afghanistan to ensure biometric screening and management of individuals identified as security risks were prevented from entering the United States.⁵ As part of the evaluation, the Inspector General will examine DOD's management of individuals who have been identified as security risks through the screening process, as well as management and tracking of individuals' ingress and egress to DOD-managed facilities while screening and vetting is not yet complete.

The Biden Administration's evident lack of preparation for an evacuation of this scale has significantly strained the U.S. military's capacity to effectively house, feed, clean, and keep the peace on the eight installations housing thousands of Afghan evacuees. The conditions across these military installations are dangerous. Reports of measles outbreaks across Afghan encampments on U.S. military installations are generating significant health risks to all Afghans on-base and the military servicemembers interacting with Afghans.⁶ Accounts of older men admitted with young girls claimed as "brides," coupled with the testimony of Afghan girls alleging rape and forced marriage by older men as a precondition for escaping Afghanistan, must be urgently investigated.⁷ Recently, two Afghan men at Fort McCoy were charged with sexual assault of minors and domestic violence.⁸ And just last week a group of male Afghan refugees temporarily housed at the Dona Ana army complex in New Mexico assaulted a female service member.⁹

The vetting process must ensure the security, medical, and criminal screening of each Afghan seeking admittance into the United States. DHS also needs to clarify exactly what actions will be taken when derogatory information is uncovered on an Afghan already paroled into the United States—we cannot release a potential terrorist into the United States, nor can we obligate our allies and partners who have aided American resettlement efforts to accept persons identified as security risks.

Secretary Mayorkas, you have expressed public confidence in the Department of Homeland Security's capacity to vet all at-risk Afghans and pride in your ability to administer relief and resettlement. Although we are willing to support the resettlement of Afghans persecuted by the Taliban—and especially vulnerable women refugees—we are concerned about DHS's request

³ Fox News, *Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby holds a press briefing*, at 17:35, YOUTUBE (Sept. 3, 2021), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdfEL3Srxn0>.

⁴ Kyle Morris, *One Hundred Afghan evacuees flagged for possible terror ties: report*, Fox News (Sept. 3, 2021), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/one-hundred-afghan-evacuees-flagged-for-possible-terror-ties-report>

⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Inspector General, *Project Announcement: Evaluation of the Screening of Displaced Persons from Afghanistan*, Project No. D2021-DEVOPD-0161.000 (Sept. 10, 2021), <https://www.dodig.mil/reports.html/Article/2770131/project-announcement-evaluation-of-the-screening-of-displaced-persons-from-afgh/>.

⁶ Eileen Sullivan, *C.D.C. requires quarantine after measles vaccination for Afghan evacuees*, NEW YORK TIMES (Sept. 20, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/20/us/politics/measles-afghan-refugees.html>.

⁷ Matthew Lee, *Afghan evacuation raises concerns about child trafficking*, AP NEWS (Sept. 3, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-child-trafficking-27d93a340c4834d497eb36e22bb72f42>.

⁸ Konstantin Toropin, *Afghan Evacuees at Fort McCoy Face Charges of Domestic Violence, Sex with Minors*, MILITARY.COM (Sept. 23, 2021), <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/09/23/afghan-evacuees-fort-mccoy-face-charges-of-domestic-violence-sex-minors.html>.

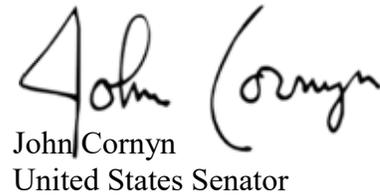
⁹ Virginia Aabram, *Female service member reports assault by Afghan refugees at Fort Bliss*, WASHINGTON EXAMINER (Sept. 24, 2021, 8:33 p.m.), <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/female-service-member-assaulted-afghan-refugees>.

for additional legislative authorities and funding for Operation Allies Welcome at a time when significant questions remain about the thoroughness of our vetting and security measures. As you conduct a thorough review of the program and make critical security adjustments, we request a briefing to the relevant committees in Congress on how the United States will proceed with security vetting and resettlement. The urgency of this briefing cannot be stressed enough; over 700 Afghans have independently departed U.S. military bases and into the country's interior, foregoing the services and oversight of the Department of Homeland Security.¹⁰ Without developing a sufficient plan and follow-on brief, the members signed below cannot in good conscience support or express any confidence in the Biden Administration's capacity or will to keep Americans safe, maintain trust with tried-and-true Afghan partners, or humanely aid vetted Afghan evacuees.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



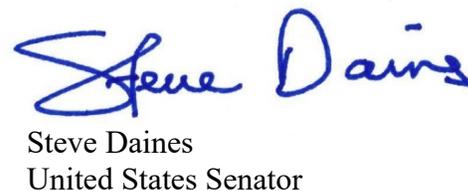
Marco Rubio
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator

¹⁰ Phil Stewart, Mica Rosenberg *Afghans are leaving U.S. military bases before resettlement*, REUTERS, (Oct. 1 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/exclusive-giant-can-worms-some-afghans-leave-us-military-bases-before-2021-10-01/>



Jerry Moran
United States Senator



Rob Portman
United States Senator



Michael S. Lee
United States Senator



Tim Scott
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator