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**One Hundred Seventeenth Congress**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
2170 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
[www.foreignaffairs.house.gov](http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov)

May 17, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Over the course of the past twenty years, our mission in Afghanistan has been supported by thousands of brave Afghan men and women who have worked as interpreters, translators, contractors, and special operators, among other important roles. These individuals have put their lives on the line to facilitate the security operations of the United States and our partners. Oftentimes their willingness to accept difficult and dangerous work was informed by the prospect of qualifying for a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) that would allow for lawful permanent residence in the United States. We made a promise to those Afghans who supported our efforts and it is imperative that we keep our word to them. No one who qualifies for a SIV should be left behind—and potentially at risk—after U.S. forces exit.

Despite an authorized cap of 26,500 Special Immigrant Visas, only about 16,000 visas have been issued since the program began. There are roughly 18,000 total applications in the current pipeline, with about 15,000 of those still at the early stages of the process—including roughly 5,000 of those waiting for initial action by the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs to determine whether the applications can proceed. There is reason to believe that – as we approach September and concerns regarding the impending security situation increase – the number of applicants will rise.

According to briefings our staff have received from the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs and Bureau of Consular Affairs, it could take upwards of two years for the State Department to complete its processing of the current pool, assuming that applicant numbers and processing rates remain static. Although we understand the review process is time-consuming and needs to be thorough, fair, and comprehensive, more must be done to eliminate chokepoints. We urge you, in coordination with other relevant agencies as needed, to expedite processing of

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the roughly 3,000 applicants that are stuck in limbo for further processing by the Bureau of Consular Affairs, awaiting the results of interagency security vetting. We also call on you to press Secretary Austin to improve the Department of Defense's contributions to the SIV process and dedicate increased DoD resources to SIV employment verification, another significant contributor to delays in processing.

Given the danger that anyone who provided support to the U.S. could face if Afghanistan falls back into civil war or if the Taliban takes greater control, the United States should promote other lines of effort in addition to the SIV program. Utilizing other applicable visa categories and sufficiently supporting refugee screening will be vital to help Afghans who face a well-founded fear of persecution because of their affiliation with the United States and our allies. With the departure of U.S. and coalition forces by September of this year, we must act swiftly.

The United States has a moral obligation and a national security interest in fulfilling its promises to those who have risked their lives to support our mission. We urge you to take every action within your power to address the backlogs outlined above, so that we do not abandon our Afghan partners in their gravest hour of need. We welcome your efforts in this regard, and your continued dialogue on how Congress and the Foreign Affairs Committee can support the swift processing of these visa applications.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. McCAUL  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



GREGORY W. MEEKS  
Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee