

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

August 20, 2021

President Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to you with grave concerns over the safety of our citizens, allies and partners in Afghanistan. Now that the Taliban have taken over the majority of Afghanistan's urban centers, many Americans and vulnerable Afghans are trapped without the ability to leave the country. Regardless of the merits and drawbacks of your decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, the United States has a responsibility to those who are now at risk because of that decision and its execution by your administration. Their safety from being taken hostage or facing reprisals from the Taliban should be your foremost priority in the coming weeks and even months.

First, we strongly urge you to outline a clear plan for the orderly evacuation of all American citizens and vulnerable Afghans who desire to leave the country. Publicly stating the United States' commitment to maintaining an orderly evacuation will ensure that those who desire to be evacuated will not constantly worry if each plane leaving is the last. U.S. troops should also ensure that the Taliban are not obstructing any individual's access to the airport. We fully expect that the U.S. forces at Hamid Karzai International Airport will be able to secure the airport and, if need be, retaliate against any attempts by the Taliban to stop evacuations.

Secondly, we urge you to use any and all tools to secure the release of Mark Freichs, who based on public reporting, is the last American hostage held by the Taliban. Mr. Freichs is a U.S. Navy veteran that was working as a civil engineer in Kabul when the Taliban abducted him in January 2020. Withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan, but leaving Freichs behind would be a disgrace to our nation's commitment to honor those who served our country in uniform. While U.S. troops remain in Kabul, they must also ensure that the Taliban do not abduct any more citizens before the end of the evacuation.

We further believe that the evacuation should not only include the 22,000 Special Immigrant Visa applicants in Afghanistan, but also those eligible for Priority 1 and Priority 2 refugee statuses. We do not need to remind you the reign of terror the Taliban had imposed on Afghanistan during the 1990s, when their harsh interpretation of Sharia law led to systemic violations of human rights. There are already reports that despite the amnesty recently announced by the Taliban, that Taliban fighters are moving door to door looking for those individuals who assisted the United States in Afghanistan as well as vulnerable groups, such as Afghan women and religious minorities. Given these reports, your administration must reconsider the onerous requirements for Afghans to bring paper documentation to the airport. Such documentation could

endanger those stopped at Taliban checkpoints. For our allies and partners that have chosen to side with the United States in conflicts the world over, there can be no more horrifying image than that of Afghan soldiers, NGO leaders, women, and others being slaughtered in the streets simply because they chose to trust the United States.

Finally, we urge you to ensure that the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security possess all the resources necessary to process and resettle these refugees. We hope that a portion of the \$500 million you announced to help Afghan refugees will go towards housing, healthcare and other expenses of Afghans relocated to third countries for processing. We also recommend that you consider deploying additional personnel to U.S. embassies in these countries to process their applications. We understand that the urgency of the Taliban's takeover of Kabul necessitated the State Department's decision to destroy Afghans' passports and applications so that these documents could not be used by the Taliban to go after these individuals. We are concerned that this decision will also further delay the processing of those Afghans' requests for asylum. We request that you provide us with the State Department's plans to process those applications that were destroyed and to keep our offices apprised of efforts to relocate applicants in safe third countries and resettle those approved for refugee status.

We firmly reject your August 16, 2021 claim that all Afghans did not display the will to fight. There are thousands of Afghans who bravely made the decision to fight alongside American troops and work with American diplomats and NGOs to secure a more prosperous future for Afghanistan, and countless more who sacrificed their lives in that struggle. We owe it to them to ensure that their decision to stand with the United States did not endanger the lives of them or their families.

Thank you for your attention to these serious matters.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



James E. Risch
U.S. Senator



Susan M. Collins
U.S. Senator



Mike Crapo
U.S. Senator