

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 27, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

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

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin:

I write to request that the U.S. Departments of State (State) and Defense (DoD) – in coordination with relevant Federal law enforcement agencies and members of the Intelligence Community (IC), if necessary – immediately develop and implement additional means of employment verification for applicants in the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program.

As you may be aware, numerous U.S. servicemembers and Veterans have reported that Afghan nationals who served alongside them as interpreters are facing difficulty or being denied SIVs because of an inability to obtain official documentation verifying employment from an employer's Human Resources (HR) department. Caseworkers in my office seeking to assist U.S. servicemembers, Veterans and other individuals in helping former interpreters navigate the Afghan SIV program are finding that the lack of HR paperwork constitutes an insurmountable hurdle that either results in the SIV application process stalling indefinitely or a SIV application being rejected altogether.

This status quo is deeply frustrating to servicemembers and Veterans who are willing to attest to serving alongside an interpreter while serving in Afghanistan. Given the urgent threat facing Afghan nationals who served alongside members of the U.S. Armed Forces and other United States Government personnel deployed to Afghanistan – which includes danger to interpreter family members – I strongly encourage State and DoD take swift action to provide an alternative means of employment verification in the Afghan SIV program.

One potential alternative verification process might involve U.S. servicemembers, Veterans and other active or retired civil servants signing sworn affidavits attesting to having worked alongside an applicant. Other forms of evidence could accompany such a sworn declaration, ranging from physical items that serve as evidence of employment or digital evidence such as images, messages and geolocation data. Of course, if a more effective and efficient means to provide alternative employment verification exists, I would strongly support your respective Departments adopting the optimal policies and procedures.

Keeping our word to Afghan nationals who upheld American values and bled alongside our troops in combat – which includes family members of interpreters killed in action – must be a diplomatic and national security priority.

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As a combat Veteran, a United States Senator and simply as an American, I am deeply committed to doing right by those Afghan nationals who did right by our troops – often at great danger, cost and sacrifice to themselves and their loved ones.

If you have any questions about my urgent request, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am ready and willing to support State and DoD to make sure that as we drawdown from Afghanistan, we do what is necessary to take Afghan interpreters and their family members with us to resettle in the Nation they have already risked their lives to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Duckworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator