

Durbin Urges Biden Administration To Take Advantage Of Parole To Expedite Evacuation Of Afghans

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WASHINGTON, D.C. —U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) joined U.S. Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT) and 27 Senators this week in sending a letter urging the Biden Administration to expedite efforts to evacuate Afghans at risk as the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates.

In their letter to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, the Senators specifically pushed for the Administration to explore the use of parole to speed up entry for Afghans with already approved visa petitions.

“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,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators continued, “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 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,” the Senators concluded.

Joining Durbin and Murphy on the letter were U.S. Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA), Ed Markey (D-MA), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Jack Reed (D-RI), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Raphael Warnock (D-GA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN.), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Gary Peters (D-MI), Michael Bennet (D-CO), Bob Casey (D-PA), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Chris Coons (D-DE), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Tina Smith (D-MN), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Maizie Hirono (D-HI), and Martin Heinrich (D-NM).

The full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

August 25, 2021

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,