

Durbin, Duckworth Join Booker, Colleagues In Calling For Swift Action To Aid American Citizens And Families Trapped In Gaza

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) in leading 13 colleagues in calling on Secretary Antony Blinken and Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to expand assistance for relatives of U.S. citizens stranded in Gaza. The Senators expressed

concerns about the current limited eligibility criteria for State Department assistance, and advocated for the State Department to press all conflicting parties to include additional family members beyond current practices. They also urged the Department of Homeland Security to implement expedited processes for adjudicating Gaza residents' applications for humanitarian parole to the United States. Additionally, the Senators requested information on the current processes in place to assist individuals stuck in Gaza who would otherwise be eligible for visas or visa renewals.

“We thank you for your steadfast leadership during this trying time, and we appreciate the State Department’s tireless work to help American citizens and their families who are or were trapped in Gaza during the current Israel-Hamas conflict. We represent constituents who are desperately seeking their family members’ safe departure from Gaza. Today, we write to urge you to expand the eligibility criteria for those able to receive State Department assistance in departing Gaza beyond immediate family members of American citizens and lawful permanent residents and enhance the level of U.S. assistance to relatives of American citizens who have safely departed Gaza and seek to be united with their loved ones in the United States,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators explained that although the United States lacks authority over who can leave Gaza via the Rafah Cross into Egypt, it remains imperative that the State Department exert maximum effort toward helping Americans and their families swiftly and securely depart the region.

Additionally, the Senators expressed serious concerns about the current process to help U.S. citizens and their family members currently trapped in Gaza, and seek answers from the State Department for the following questions:

1. “What is the basis for the current State Department policy regarding the categories of people eligible for the Department’s assistance in departing Gaza through the Rafah Crossing?”
2. What processes are in place to assist individuals stuck in Gaza who would otherwise be eligible for consideration for visas or visa renewals but who have had visas expire during the current conflict?”

Currently, the State Department considers the following people eligible for U.S. assistance in submitting their names to the relevant Egyptian and Israeli authorities for the ability to cross the border into Egypt at the Rafah Crossing:

1. U.S. citizens and their spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21, parents, and unmarried siblings under the age of 21 if their U.S. citizen sibling is also under the age of 21; and

2. Lawful permanent residents with an unexpired green card and their spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21.

“We believe the above limited groups of people currently eligible for assistance from the Department are too narrow and restrict our ability to secure the safe departure of U.S. citizen family members, including their brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews, who are caught in the crossfire of this conflict. We urge the Department to quickly expand the categories of people eligible for this assistance to include, at a minimum, any American citizen’s children, siblings, and sibling’s spouses and children—regardless of marital status and age—as well as unmarried grandchildren under the age of 21,” the lawmakers continued.

“In addition to the State Department submitting the information of those who seek to leave Gaza to the relevant authorities, we urge the Department of Homeland Security to expedite the review and adjudication of Gaza residents’ applications for humanitarian parole in the United States, including for eligible persons that remain stuck in Gaza and are unable to physically appear in-person at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate for parole processing. It’s critical to ensure that people who are eligible for humanitarian parole have ready access to this process and the protection it provides,” the Senators continued.

“As a result of the dangerous circumstances on the ground, we urge you to quickly implement these changes in policy to help U.S. citizens and their family members get out of harm’s way,” the lawmakers concluded.

Joining Durbin, Duckworth, and Booker in sending the letter are U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), John Fetterman (D-PA), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Brian Schatz (D-HI), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Rev. Raphael Warnock (D-GA), and Elizabeth Warren (D-MA).

The read the full text of the letter, [click here](#).