

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 10, 2016

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen McCain and Thornberry, Ranking Members Reed and Smith, and Conferees:

During conference committee consideration of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, we encourage you to follow the Senate-passed motion to instruct conferees to include language to extend the Afghan special immigrant visa (SIV) program and authorize additional visas, while also retaining the future viability of this critical program.

The Afghan SIV program was first enacted through the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 to provide a life-saving path to safety for Afghan nationals who worked alongside U.S. troops, diplomats, and contractors, and who face serious danger as a result of that work. Since then, the program has been extended and reformed numerous times, each time with significant bipartisan and bicameral support. This year, Congress must act so that the State Department can continue to issue visas to Afghans who face imminent threat from the Taliban and other hostile groups because of their service to the U.S. and our allies. Prominent military leaders, diplomats, and national security experts, including Gen. John Nicholson, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, Gen. David Petraeus, and Amb. Ryan Crocker, have urged Congress to take action, noting that this program is essential to U.S. national security and credibility amongst our allies.

The Administration aims to issue the remaining authorized visas by the end of this calendar year. Meanwhile, there are thousands of Afghans at some stage in the SIV process and qualified individuals continue to apply. That is why the President, in his FY2017 budget, asked Congress to authorize additional visas to help address the remaining backlog of applicants. Without further congressional action, the State Department will exhaust its current supply of visas, essentially halting the SIV program, stranding these valuable allies and sending a discouraging message to allies involved in future engagements. We urge you to authorize these additional visas to prevent a shutdown of the SIV program.

During the House's consideration of H.R. 4909, language was included in Section 1216 that would restrict program eligibility to exclude Afghans who worked in U.S. consulates, embassies, or military bases. These restrictions could have a harmful impact on those Afghans that worked on-base with U.S. troops, or in any number of capacities with U.S. diplomats, because they are just as likely to face danger if their service becomes known to forces hostile to the United States. We urge you to retain current eligibility guidelines for the Afghan SIV program. These allies risked their lives to serve the United States and we owe it to them to ensure their safety.

We urge you to stand in strong support of our national security and, in recognition of the sacrifice of our Afghan allies, to authorize additional visas for SIV applicants and to protect current SIV guidelines. In previous years, Congress has used the NDAA to demonstrate our strong support to these important allies while assuring others across the globe that the United States will stand by its commitments in future missions. We urge you to continue to do so.

Sincerely,



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Adam Kinzinger
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Steve Stivers
Member of Congress



Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Sean P. Duffy
Member of Congress



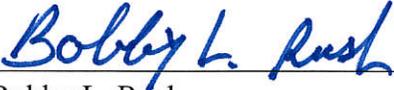
Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress



Robert J. Dold
Member of Congress



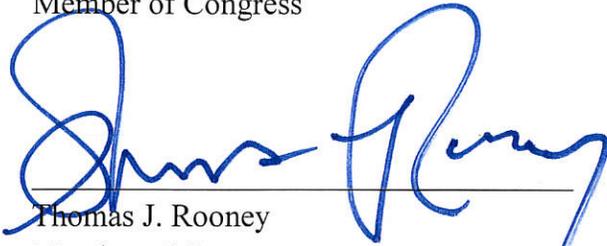
Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



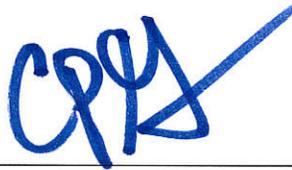
Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Sam Farr
Member of Congress



Christopher P. Gibson
Member of Congress



John K. Delaney
Member of Congress



Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



Brad Wenstrup
Member of Congress



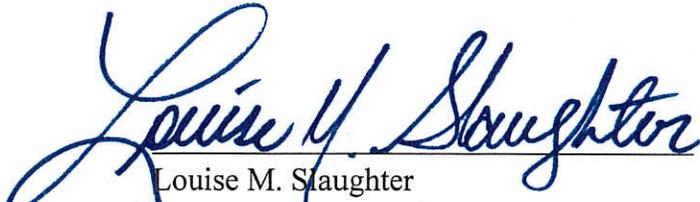
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson
Member of Congress



John Conyers
Member of Congress



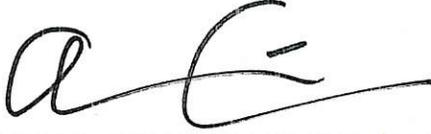
Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Louise M. Slaughter
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress



Andre Carson
Member of Congress



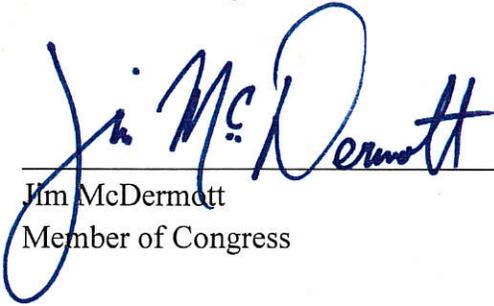
Glenn Thompson
Member of Congress



Beto O'Rourke
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress

Cc: Conferees on the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act