

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 24, 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Ranking Member McCarthy:

We write to request that emergency legislation related to COVID-19 include protections for refugees, asylees, and other immigrants.

First, we request that funding for refugee admissions be included in this or future COVID-19 legislation to ensure that the needs of our newest neighbors are met. We request an additional \$350 million in Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) funds for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) within the State Department, as well as an additional \$462 million in Refugee and Entrant Assistance (REA) funds for the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Dep't of Health and Human Services (HHS) for resettlement services. This funding is critical to ensuring that recent refugee and special immigrant arrivals receive direct assistance, such as cash and medical assistance, housing/rent, utilities, transportation, food, and health needs unavailable through normally operating public channels.

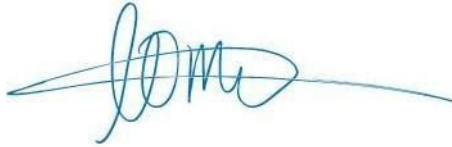
Second, given that refugee admissions are [suspended](#), we request report language directing the Departments of State and its partners to resume refugee admissions expeditiously, consistent with general travel restrictions from refugees' countries of residence.

We must address the impact of COVID-19 on applicants for immigrant and refugee status, as security checks, visas, and entry permits have limited validity periods. Report language should therefore direct the Departments of State and Homeland Security to extend validity periods for visas and security checks to account for coronavirus-related delays, and to take all action afforded by law to extend the authorization dates of travel documents that have expired recently or will expire before the end of the current U.S. travel restrictions and the global pandemic. Where necessary, revised medical checks should be provided at no cost to the applicant. Failing to extend these expiration dates would punish individuals who have satisfied all requirements for admission to the United States.

The report language should also direct the Departments of State and Homeland Security to extend deadlines on applications, including periods to submit visa applications, respond to Requests for Evidence, or to submit Affidavits or Relationship or I-730 petitions. The report language should also direct the Department of State to continue refugee processing stages that are unaffected by the virus, to extend security check periods wherever possible, to resume refugee admissions in a manner equivalent to treatment of travel from refugees' country of residence, and to reallocate refugee admissions priorities to ensure that the Presidential Determination for Fiscal Year 2020 can be met in full.

Refugees, special immigrants, and immigrant visa applicants are important members of American communities. Refugees are the most vetted travelers to the United States and face rigorous security checks that take years to complete. Further, immigrants often wait for years and go to great lengths and expense to obtain visas to enter the United States. Afghan SIVs in particular have been persecuted for their faithful and valuable service to the U.S. government. Now is the time to ensure that we do not turn our backs on those we promised to welcome.

Respectfully,



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress

Additional signers:

Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton
Rep. Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Rep. Gerald E. Connolly
Rep. Tony Cárdenas
Rep. Earl Blumenauer
Rep. Rashida Tlaib
Rep. Gwen Moore
Rep. Mark Pocan
Rep. James P. McGovern
Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez
Rep. Jahana Hayes
Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva
Rep. David N. Cicilline
Rep. Jamie Raskin
Rep. Darren Soto
Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney
Rep. Adriano Espaillat
Rep. Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.

Proposed report language:

Congress recognizes that many individuals with valid immigrant visas or entry permits are currently outside the United States and face difficulties traveling to the United States, or inside the United States and facing expiration of their status. Others applying for visas or immigration benefits face deadlines to submit applications, appear for interviews, or to provide evidence. The Committee directs the Departments of State and Homeland Security to exercise favorable discretion to extend validity periods deadlines as a matter of policy and authorize or extend parole during the coronavirus-19 pandemic. Congress directs the Department of State to extend medical check validity periods except for infectious diseases and at no cost to the applicant. Congress directs the Departments of State and Homeland Security to continue to exercise favorable discretion until the World Health Organization deems the virus to be in a post-pandemic period and all coronavirus-19-related Presidential Proclamations restricting travel are rescinded.

Congress, in particular, directs the Departments of State and Homeland Security to exercise favorable discretion for individuals applying for humanitarian-based immigration benefits, including pursuant to Immigration and Nationality Act Sections 207 and 208; and for special immigrant status pursuant to Section 1059(a) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, P.L. 109-163; Section

1244(b) of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007, P.L. 110-181; and Section 602(b) of the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, P.L. 111-8. Congress directs the Department of State and its vetting partners to extend security check validity periods for refugees and special immigrants, and to reallocate refugee admissions to ensure that the Presidential Determination for fiscal year 2020 can be reached. Congress also directs the Departments of State and Homeland Security to continue processing of humanitarian-based immigration benefits to the extent such processing is unaffected by the virus and the Department of State to resume refugee admissions expeditiously consistent with general travel restrictions from refugees' countries of residence.

Congress recognizes the importance of assisting newly arrived refugees and Special Immigrant Visa (SIVs) recipients in light of the coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring all community members are able to mitigate risks to their vulnerability to COVID-19. Congress also recognizes that the infrastructure of the resettlement program is being challenged, particularly in light of the moratorium of arrivals, inhibiting their ability to serve not just newcomers, but also refugees already resettled, as well as Afghan and Iraqi SIV recipients, asylees, and others. Congress further recognizes that it is important to preserve the capacity of overseas infrastructure, including the Refugee Support Centers (RSCs) overseas, so that refugee arrivals can resume expeditiously. Congress therefore directs the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration to:

- 1. Increase the R&P direct assistance by \$1,000 per capita to strengthen direct support for new arrivals, effective upon signing this legislation into law through September 30, 2020;*
- 2. Provide \$1,200 in cash assistance directly to each refugee and Afghan and Iraqi SIV who has arrived in the United States in the last 12 months;*
- 3. Obligate funding to each of the nine refugee resettlement agencies in order to stabilize the refugee resettlement infrastructure required to continue serving refugees, amount to be calculated by the Department of State, in consultation with the nine national resettlement agencies; and*
- 4. Maintain level funding to the RSCs even while processing refugees for resettlement to the United States is temporarily suspended.*