



OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
332 Dirksen Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

April 13, 2022

Dear Senator Sanders,

I write to support the Community Asylum Seekers Projects (CASP) proposal for a Vermont Asylum Assistance Project. I met with representatives from CASP last fall and heard about this project, which is being planned in collaboration between CASP and pro bono asylum attorneys in Vermont. It meets a crucial need for Vermont's immigrant population, which is expected to grow when federal restrictions on asylum are lifted in May.

The purpose of this project is to build Vermont's legal capacity to welcome asylum seekers and Afghan evacuees. Funding will be aimed at addressing the shortage of pro bono legal assistance in the state and promoting the rights of immigrant communities and asylum-seekers living in Vermont. I recently met with two asylum seekers and their advocates in Brattleboro a few months ago and can attest to the difficulties faced by this population, particularly with regard to navigating the legal system. I've also met with several Afghan refugees here in Vermont who arrived as "humanitarian parolees" and who need access to legal services. Without an Afghan Adjustment Act, Afghan evacuees remain in legal limbo. We have an obligation to help them become permanent residents and to do all we can to reunite them with their families.

The Vermont Asylum Assistance Project's mission is to act as a resource for recruiting, training, and supporting a network of pro bono immigration attorneys, and is modeled on successful projects of the same kind in other states in our region. It will enable Vermont to fully welcome our immigrant neighbors and I encourage you to give this project every support and consideration. I'm also resharing the letter I sent to your office on February 16th regarding an Afghan Adjustment Act.

Sincerely,

Molly R. Gray

Molly Gray

Vermont Lieutenant Governor



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Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
437 Russell Senate Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
332 Dirksen Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter Welch
2187 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2022

Dear Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders, and Representative Welch:

In recent weeks, my office has received an outpouring of contact from Vermonters wishing to support Afghans arriving in Vermont. I'm proud of their advocacy, and right to give voice to their concerns, which I also share.

As more Afghan refugees arrive in the United States and are welcomed to Vermont, many face significant hurdles in their journey to U.S. citizenship. Some have received Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) granting them permanent resident status after one year. More commonly, because of the rapid emergency evacuation out of Afghanistan, Afghans have been admitted as "humanitarian parolees". In this case, they must first apply for and be granted asylum, a legal process that can take many years and require significant, costly legal representation. Making matters worse, Vermont lacks qualified legal representation to handle additional asylum cases. As a result, Afghan refugees are subject to greater vulnerabilities while contending with an uncertain future.

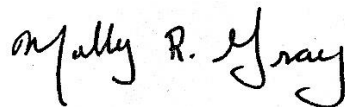
To allow "humanitarian parolees" to effectively resettle in Vermont without further trauma and to become independent, contributing, members of our community, Congress must immediately pass an Afghan Adjustment Act. An Afghan Adjustment Act would allow certain Afghan evacuees to apply for permanent resident status after one year of being paroled. Passing an Afghan Adjustment Act would relieve the immediate burden on the SIV process — which currently has over 18,000 backlogged cases. Moreover, the asylum process currently has over 1 million backlogged cases.

Similar legislation has been used several times in the past to assist groups who have arrived in the United States because of an emergency situation in their home country. For example, in 1966 Congress passed a bill to allow Cuban parolees who fled the communist regime to apply for legal permanent status after one year of residence in the country. Similarly, Congress acted in 1977 to allow for more than 150,000 refugees from Southeast Asia to apply for permanent residence.

An Afghan Adjustment Act would fulfill our humanitarian obligation to vulnerable Afghans contending with uncertain futures. Moreover, passing an Afghan Adjustment Act is the least our country can do to honor the sacrifices of our Afghan Allies and the risks associated with their service.

Your leadership on refugee resettlement has always set Vermont apart. Our communities stand ready to welcome Afghans. Let's ensure they have the immigration status and access to support necessary to successfully rebuild their lives in the Green Mountain State. I hope you will do all you can to quickly pass an Afghan Adjustment Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly R. Gray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Molly Gray

Vermont Lieutenant Governor

Cc:

Vermont Governor, Phil Scott

Vermont Senate President Pro Tempore, Becca Balint

Vermont House Speaker, Jill Krowinski