

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations,
and Related Programs
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Subcommittee Chairman Graham:

As you work with your counterparts to finalize the Fiscal Year 2017 Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) Appropriations Act, we write to request that you include no fewer than 2,500 additional visas for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program. That number represents the 4,000 SIVs the Senate Appropriations Committee sought to authorize in its committee-passed SFOPS bill, less the 1,500 visas that were included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017.

As you know, the Afghan SIV program offers carefully vetted Afghans whose lives are in danger because of the critical assistance they provided to our soldiers and diplomats the chance to seek refuge in the United States. Unfortunately, this critical program is projected to run out of visas by the end of May, stranding many thousands of qualified Afghans.

Keeping our promise to those Afghans who meet the strict qualifications of this program is a strategic imperative as well as a moral one. That explains why the Afghan SIV program enjoys such overwhelming support of current and former military leaders. During his confirmation process, Secretary Mattis noted that “most of our units could not have accomplished their missions without the assistance, often at risk to their lives, of these courageous men and women,” and he pledged to work to ensure such individuals are not left behind. General John W. Nicholson, Commander, Resolute Support and United States Forces – Afghanistan, recently told the Senate Armed Services Committee that shutting down the Afghan SIV program would be the “wrong message to send our Afghan partners.”

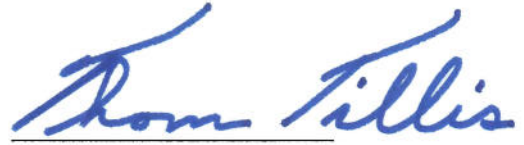
This committee recognized the importance of supporting the Afghan SIV program when it passed an SFOPS bill for FY2017 that authorized 4,000 additional visas. Given that history and the pressing need for additional visas beyond the 1,500 included in the FY2017 NDAA, we respectfully urge you to ensure that no fewer than 2,500 additional Afghan SIVs are included in whatever mechanism funds the State Department through the end of Fiscal Year 2017.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

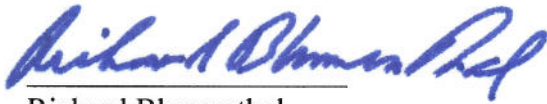
Sincerely,



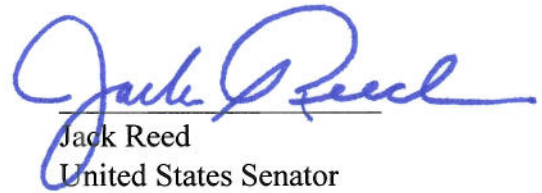
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator