

Shaheen Leads Bipartisan Legislation That Provides Additional Visas For Afghan Interpreters and Support Staff

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New legislation introduced today calls for 4,000 additional Afghan Special Immigrant Visas for those whose lives are in danger for supporting the U.S. mission

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(Washington, DC)— Today, U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) joined with Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC), Jack Reed (D-RI), Roger Wicker (R-MS), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Cory Gardner (R-CO) and Tim Kaine (D-VA), to introduce legislation that would provide additional visas for Afghans who have assisted the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and whose lives are in jeopardy because of their service. *The Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2019* would provide 4,000 Afghan Special Immigrant Visas (SIV) for fiscal year 2020 and begin to address administrative obstacles that prevent Afghan and Iraqi allies from receiving visas through SIV programs. Senator Shaheen has been a leader in Congress on the

Afghan SIV program and, working alongside Senator John McCain, has spearheaded efforts every fiscal year to provide new visas.

“Afghan civilians continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Americans in the battlefield at tremendous risk to the safety and welfare of their families,” **said Shaheen.** “Their service in support of our military and diplomatic personnel in Afghanistan has saved American lives and we have an obligation to provide sanctuary from terrorist threats. I am very concerned by reports that the administration has drastically reduced the distribution of visas for both the Afghan SIV program and Iraqi Direct Access Program. Any failure to uphold our nation’s promise to these brave men and women, jeopardizes local support in future missions. As a nation, we must be true to our word, and Congress can do its part by

making sure enough visas are consistently made available. I'm very pleased that, once again, this effort will be on a bipartisan basis."

"I know firsthand that our country and military rely upon the support of the brave Afghan men and women who risk their lives to help the United States. For this reason, my husband, Senator John McCain, was a stalwart supporter of this program throughout his career and would be pleased to know that his legacy lives on through this bipartisan bill. I urge quick passage of this legislation so that not one more of our Afghan heroes is harmed while awaiting refuge in the United States and thank the bipartisan cosponsors of this critical measure." –

Cindy McCain, Chair of the Board of Trustees of the McCain Institute for International Leadership

“Many brave Afghans have risked their lives in order to support American troops and their efforts to defeat terrorists,” **said Senator Tillis.** “In return, America has provided some Afghans with a safe haven from the Taliban who seek to harm them and their families for assisting America’s mission in Afghanistan. This bipartisan legislation will give a limited number of Visas to specifically protect those who are allies of the United States.”

“These brave wartime allies have provided critical assistance to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. This bipartisan bill would help restore our commitment to those who have risked their lives in support of U.S. national security interests,” **said Senator Reed, the Ranking Member of the Armed Services Committee.** “This bill furthers American strategic interests in the region and upholds our promises to these brave men and women.”

“Thousands of Afghan citizens have risked their lives to support the United States and our mission in their country,” **Wicker said.** “This legislation would protect more of our Afghan partners, as well as their families, who are often threatened because of the assistance they provided to the American government.”

“This bill would give brave Afghans and their families the opportunity to come to the United States after selflessly supporting our military and diplomatic personnel,” said Blumenthal. “These men and women put their lives on the line for us, and they are owed safety, security, and freedom from persecution. Congress must act now to keep this critical visa program alive.”

“When I was in Afghanistan, I had the opportunity to meet with American commanders and troops from Colorado, along with several Afghan soldiers and

civilians assisting the United States Armed Forces in our fight against terror," **said Gardner.** "These Afghan personnel are standing shoulder to shoulder with the United States and providing critical support to our mission. We must thank them for their sacrifice and provide refuge to these courageous Afghans. This bipartisan legislation is a good first step to keep our promise to the Afghan people."

"The tireless work of many Afghans has saved American lives and aided our mission in Afghanistan," **said Kaine.** "Supporting a special visa program to ensure that those who have fought alongside our troops can apply for refuge in the United States is the least we can do to recognize their service."

"This act will provide an avenue to safety for thousands of Afghans who risked their lives on behalf of U.S. forces, and help ensure that the U.S.

government makes good on its promise to protect those who are threatened for their service. This bill reflects a bipartisan consensus that wartime partners and their families should not be abandoned to fend for themselves." - **Adam Bates, Policy Counsel, International Refugee Assistance Project**

"This legislation is a promise kept. Whether as interpreters, translators, or supporting staff, Afghans stand beside us keeping our troops safe and helping our missions succeed. They do this at great personal risk because we called upon them to fight those who threaten the safety of us all. This legislation not only fulfills our side of the bargain by providing them a lifeline, it makes our nation more secure." - **Bishop Garrison, Human Rights First Director of National Security Outreach and project leader of Veterans for American Ideals**

"No One Left Behind is so proud to stand with the Senator and other members of Congress supporting this important national security issue. 19,000 Afghan allies are still waiting for the visas they were promised. Many saved American lives. These allies are now being targeted by the Taliban with night letters threatening to behead them while they wait for the US to keep its promise." - **James Miervaldis, Board Member, No One Left Behind**

Text of the *Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2019* can be read here.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

(<https://www.shaheen.senate.gov/services/office-locations>)