

September 19, 2018

Dear Members of Congress,

We represent more than two hundred thousand veterans from every branch of the United States military and every American conflict since Vietnam.

Our military has a strong, strategic tradition of depending on local allies. While deployed, we relied on these wartime partners to complete the mission.

Throughout U.S. military engagement in Afghanistan, thousands of locals have provided mission support as interpreters, translators, cultural advisors, logisticians, and as contractors for the U.S. embassy, USAID, and other agencies. In exchange for their service, the United States pledged to protect them through the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program, enacted in 2009.

Many of our wartime allies who remain in Afghanistan live in constant fear that they or their families will be targeted by insurgents. For many the SIV program is their lifeline.

General John W. Nicholson, current commander in Afghanistan, has warned of the national security consequences of failing to honor our commitment. In an April 2018 letter to Senator John McCain, General Nicholson cautioned: "If this program is not fully resourced, it could significantly undermine our credibility and the 17 years of tremendous sacrifice by thousands of Afghans on behalf of Americans."

In this year's Presidential Budget, the administration requested four thousand Afghan Special Immigrant Visas. Yet Congress failed to include this request in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019.

In a Statement of Administration Policy dated June 26, 2018, the administration expressed its disappointment that this year's NDAA excluded a provision for these four thousand additional visas. "Without allocating additional visas," the statement reads, "there will be no authority to fully address the current pipeline of eligible individuals estimated at approximately 16,700 or any further eligible individuals who apply before the December 2020 deadline."

There is overwhelming bipartisan, bicameral support for this program. Both the House and Senate State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee reports for Fiscal Year 2019 affirmed the critical role of the SIV program. The Senate version states: "It is the sense of the Senate that the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program is important to the national interests of the United States."

Congress should act to allocate a minimum of four thousand additional Afghan SIVs to address the current backlog and protect this lifeline for our Afghan allies.

Each year that the United States commits military forces in Afghanistan, more of our wartime partners will turn to us for help. And as the United States continues to protect its interests around the world, it will need the assistance of those willing to stand with us.

We urge Congress to do what is in our strategic interest and honor our promise.

Respectfully,

*High Ground Veterans Advocacy*

*Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America*

*No One Left Behind*

*Veterans for American Ideals*

*Vietnam Veterans of America*