

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 16, 2011

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of the Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Panetta:

On October 21, 2011, President Obama announced that all American troops will be withdrawn from Iraq by year's end. This troop withdrawal may heighten the potential for retaliation against Iraqis who worked for the U.S. government or for other governmental and non-governmental entities that supported the U.S. mission in Iraq.

Such Iraqis may be eligible to be admitted to the United States on a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV), but the processing of such visas has proven difficult for security reasons and has been subject to delays. According to the State Department's statistics, as of March 31, 2011, four years after the expansion of the SIV program in Section 1244 of the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, only 3,151 principal visas have been issued out of a possible 25,000. For Fiscal Year 2011, only 154 principal visas had been issued by March 31, 2011, out of the 5,000 authorized.

The Iraqis assisted by this program and other SIV programs risked their lives to help protect the U.S. mission in Iraq. Delays in processing are leaving these Iraqis and their families vulnerable to retaliation, including death, for their service to the United States. We appreciate that the Department of Defense is not the agency primarily involved in screening SIV applicants, but we ask that you take steps to ensure that all applicants with some prior work for the Department or a contractor be processed expeditiously.

Section 1236 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011 requires you to develop a plan with the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security to expedite resettlement of U.S.-affiliated Iraqis at risk as the United States withdraws from Iraq. We do not want to create a dynamic in which we abandon those who risked their lives for the United States effort in Iraq – only to face the aftermath of the war on their own. On September 6, 2011, Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano stated that, “Interagency discussions on the development of the plan are currently underway.” Given the passage of more than two months time, and the recent announcement about the withdrawal of U.S. troops in Iraq, what is the status of that plan?

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Thank you for your attention to this matter.

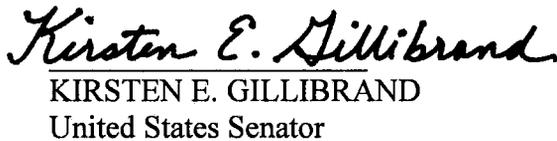
Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

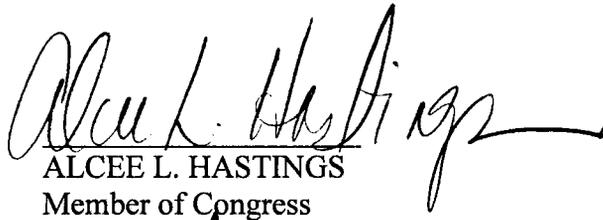

CARL LEVIN
United States Senator


RICHARD J. DURBIN
United States Senator

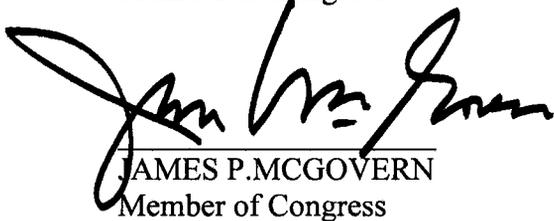

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN
United States Senator


KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND
United States Senator


ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senator


ALCEE L. HASTINGS
Member of Congress


ZOE LOFGREN
Member of Congress


JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State
The Honorable Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Security