

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



Homeland
Security

November 4, 2021

The Honorable Steve Daines
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Daines:

Thank you for your October 22, 2021 letter regarding a recent incident involving an Afghan evacuee in Missoula, Montana.

As you know, Afghan evacuees complete a rigorous and multi-layered screening and vetting process that includes national security and criminal records checks before they can enter the United States. This process includes intelligence, law enforcement, and counterterrorism professionals from the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), and other Intelligence Community partners reviewing fingerprints, photos, and other biometric and biographic data for every Afghan evacuee.

Upon evacuation from Afghanistan and before being cleared to travel to the United States, Afghan evacuees are brought to international transit points where the U.S. government collects and reviews biometric (e.g., facial images and fingerprints) and biographic (e.g., name, date of birth, and ID number) information. Biometric data is compared against DOD, DHS, and FBI repositories. Biographic information is vetted by NCTC, FBI, and other Intelligence Community partners. Only those evacuees who clear these comprehensive checks are approved for onward travel to the United States.

As with other arrivals at U.S. ports of entry, Afghan evacuees must complete a primary inspection upon arriving at a U.S. airport. This inspection is conducted by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers and includes additional biographic and biometric checks. Those evacuees who are identified by CBP as requiring further review as a result of primary inspection are referred to secondary inspection, where additional reviews of information are conducted by CBP and other federal partners as warranted. Only those evacuees who clear port of entry processing are permitted to enter the United States.

All arrivals – U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and Afghan nationals – are tested for COVID-19. Afghan evacuees, including those who have applied for special immigrant status but have not yet received a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) prior to arriving in the United States, are granted humanitarian parole on a case-by-case basis and transported to one of eight domestic military facilities known as safe havens. As a condition of their humanitarian parole, Afghan evacuees receive medical exams and health screenings and are required to receive vaccinations

for various illnesses, to include measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), polio, varicella (chickenpox), and COVID-19, among others. Failure to comply with conditions of parole could result in the termination of parole status and removal from the United States.

At the safe havens, Operation Allies Welcome provides shelter and other essential services, such as assistance with applying for employment authorization, and connects Afghan evacuees with resettlement organizations that support their integration into communities across our country so they can begin rebuilding their lives. The resettlement process considers U.S.-based family and friends, housing availability, community capacity, and the needs and characteristics of each case.

If an Afghan evacuee engages in criminal activity after arriving in the United States, the evacuee may be subject to prosecution, revocation of parole, and placement in removal proceedings. These cases are extremely rare. Through Operation Allies Welcome, the federal government and its partners provide information about expectations for compliance with U.S. laws, as well as related consequences for violations, at multiple points throughout the resettlement process.

Regarding the recent incident involving an Afghan evacuee in Missoula, Montana, the suspect remains in local law enforcement custody pending criminal proceedings. This evacuee completed the rigorous and multi-layered screening and vetting process described above at an international transit point and again at a U.S. port of entry. Prior to being granted entry into the United States, no derogatory information, including a criminal record, was identified. If the evacuee is convicted of or pleads guilty to the criminal charge for which he was arrested in Montana, or if he is otherwise determined to have violated a condition of parole or be a threat to public safety, he will be placed in removal proceedings.

Thank you again for your letter and for your continued support of the Department of Homeland Security. The safety and security of our communities is our top priority and I look forward to continue working closely with you on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary