October 17, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Republican Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader Schumer, and Leader McConnell:

On behalf of the nation’s Governors, we are encouraged to see Congress introduce bipartisan, bicameral legislation to provide the thousands of Afghan humanitarian parolees who have arrived in the United States over the past year, and who undergo additional vetting, the opportunity to apply for permanent legal residency.

Our nation’s Governors have played a key role in assisting the huge influx of Afghan nationals who began arriving in the United States a year ago. We have worked closely with the Department of State, our local resettlement agencies, faith-based organizations, and a variety of other institutions to help feed, clothe, and house our Afghan allies. We are invested in their welfare and in seeing them become independent and constructive members of our communities, as thousands of refugees before them have become.

While some Afghans arrived under Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), many more arrived as humanitarian parolees, allowing them to remain in the safety of the United States for only two years. Under this status they have very limited options to a pathway of permanency in the U.S., and many would be left without permanent immigration status. Although no one believes it would be humane policy to send them back to Afghanistan, it’s also bad policy to leave them in legal limbo. The reality is that the only path for our new neighbors to permanency is through a very complex and long asylum process. Many of these individuals are in mixed-status families and their intentions are to remain in the U.S. as they rebuild their lives. They are understandably uncertain about whether to pursue education and employment and put down roots in other ways, not knowing what may happen in the next year.
To that end, we encourage Congress to move swiftly to provide these families and individuals the certainty of safe harbor in the United States that will allow them to build a flourishing life.

As we have resettled Afghans in states and territories across the country, we have experienced a generous outpouring of support, donations, and service from businesses, religious and civic institutions, and individuals. We opened our arms wide to welcome Afghan allies and their families into our communities and ensure they had safe housing, food, baby formula and cleaning supplies, medical and mental health care, and support to enroll students in school. We continue helping them find employment, receive English language support, match their skills and experience with employers, and have a safe haven to build a new life.

These local efforts must be matched by Congressional action for our Afghan allies and the certainty that will allow them to move forward with their lives. Providing a pathway to obtain permanent legal status is not unique. Congress has passed similar legislation on humanitarian grounds for previous wartime evacuations and humanitarian crises. This will be a sound policy that will provide some relief to the strained asylum system we are currently experiencing.

We strongly urge Congress to act quickly this fall to honor our commitments to our Afghan allies.

Sincerely,

Governor Lemanu P. S. Mauga
Territory of American Samoa

Governor Gavin Newsom
State of California

Governor Jared Polis
State of Colorado

Governor Ned Lamont
State of Connecticut

Governor Leon Guerrero
Territory of Guam

Governor JB Pritzker
State of Illinois
Governor John Bel Edwards  
State of Louisiana

Governor Kate Brown  
State of Oregon

Governor Spencer Cox  
State of Utah

Governor Jay Inslee  
State of Washington

Governor Phil Murphy  
State of New Jersey

Governor Tom Wolf  
State of Pennsylvania

Governor Phil Scott  
State of Vermont