

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 17, 2023

Mr. Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken and Mr. Sullivan:

We write to urge you to do everything possible to provide assistance to U.S. citizens fleeing the Gaza Strip, including our constituents from New England.

We fully support Israel's right to defend itself and we have called for Israel to uphold the rule of law and protect innocent civilians in Gaza. We will continue to do so. We are also concerned that our offices have received requests from multiple families from New England who are seeking assistance. These families are terrified for their lives and growing more frustrated as promises of escape through the opening of the Rafah crossing remain unfulfilled. As with all civilians in Gaza, these families' situation only grows more concerning as Gaza runs out of food, water, fuel for hospitals, and other critical supplies.¹

One publicly reported case is a family from Medway, Massachusetts. Abood Okal is a Palestinian American, who went to Gaza to visit family. He is now stuck in Gaza with his wife and one-year-old son.² Abood's sister, who was also visiting, attempted to cross the border from Gaza into Egypt when the crossing came under fire from Israel and she was forced back.³ She is now awaiting passage to safety with her three children, including one who is only two months old.⁴ On Saturday, at the State Department's direction, they joined hundreds of people waiting for hours to cross the border, only for the border guards to not allow anyone to cross into Egypt.⁵ According to the family's attorney, they have already run out of drinking water, will soon run out of food, and cannot access the necessary fuel to make the journey to the crossing again.⁶ This family's plight is just one example of the urgency of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

¹ PBS, "Food, water and medicine run low in Gaza amid deadly Israeli airstrikes, delayed aid," Najib Jobain, Samya Kullab, and Joseph Krauss, October 16, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/food-water-and-medicine-run-low-in-gaza-amid-deadly-israeli-airstrikes-delayed-aid>.

² WBUR, "Mass. family stuck in Gaza pleads for help as airstrikes rain down," Deborah Becker, Stevee Chapman, and Katie Cole, October 13, 2023, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2023/10/12/massachusetts-family-stuck-gaza-israel>

³ *Id.*


⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Boston Globe, "'We're kicking into survival mode': Medway family among Americans trapped in Gaza," John Hilliard, October 15, 2023, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/10/15/world/were-kicking-into-survival-mode-medway-family-among-americans-trapped-gaza-sunday-amid-hamas-israel-war/>

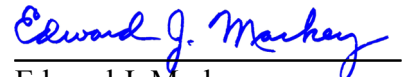
⁶ Boston 25 News, "'Do or die situation': Medway family trapped on Gaza Strip," Drew Karedes, October 15, 2023, <https://www.boston25news.com/news/local/do-or-die-situation-medway-family-trapped-gaza-strip/TMJB4J4XXZDL3OZT4RNVQLH2D4/>.

We appreciate all of the work the State Department is doing to secure humanitarian aid and safe passage for these families, as well as the support and communication we have received from the State Department regarding assistance for Americans. But we continue to have questions about what assistance will be provided to these families, including transportation assistance and security assurances of the crossing area, as well as more information about when these families can be confident there will be safe passage through the Rafah crossing. We urge you to immediately implement a plan to protect these civilians and request the State Department brief our offices as soon as possible.

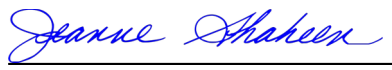
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator