

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 13, 2024

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

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
300 7th Street SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas:

We thank you for your steadfast leadership during this trying time, and we appreciate the State Department's tireless work to help American citizens and their families who are or were trapped in Gaza during the current Israel-Hamas conflict. We represent constituents who are desperately seeking their family members' safe departure from Gaza. Today, we write to urge you to expand the eligibility criteria for those able to receive State Department assistance in departing Gaza beyond immediate family members of American citizens and enhance the level of U.S. assistance to relatives of American citizens who have safely departed Gaza and seek to be united with their loved ones in the United States.

The Israel-Hamas war initiated by Hamas's brutal terror attacks on October 7, 2023, is causing immense suffering among Israelis and Palestinians. In Gaza, the current death toll is devastating and the humanitarian conditions continue to worsen with extraordinarily limited access to food, water, medicine, fuel, shelter, and safety. While the United States does not control who is able to depart through Rafah Crossing into Egypt, we must do all we can to help American citizens and their family members who seek to leave Gaza do so quickly and safely.

Our understanding is that the process for U.S. citizens and their relatives to enter Egypt through the Rafah Crossing begins when U.S. citizens seeking assistance for themselves or their family members submit the names, contact information, and other information of those seeking to evacuate Gaza to the State Department. The State Department receives and processes this information to determine whether the individuals seeking assistance meet the eligibility criteria. The State Department then provides the names, citizenship, and passport information to the relevant authorities in Egypt and Israel. The Palestinian General Authority for Crossings and Borders (overseen by de facto authorities in Gaza), who ultimately receive this information, post a list of persons eligible to cross into Egypt on its Facebook page. An individual's name must appear on the Crossings and Border list to leave Gaza.

We have serious concerns about a number of aspects of the current process to help U.S. citizens and their family members who remain trapped in Gaza. Accordingly, we seek answers to the following questions:

1. What is the basis for the current State Department policy regarding the categories of people eligible for the Department's assistance in departing Gaza through the Rafah Crossing?
2. What processes are in place to assist individuals stuck in Gaza who would otherwise be eligible for consideration for visas or visa renewals but who have had visas expire during the current conflict?

Further, as of the date of this letter, it's our understanding the Department considers the following people eligible for U.S. assistance in submitting their names to the relevant Egyptian and Israeli authorities for the ability to cross the border into Egypt at the Rafah Crossing:

1. U.S. citizens and their spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21, parents, and unmarried siblings under the age of 21 if their U.S. citizen sibling is also under the age of 21; and
2. Lawful permanent residents with an unexpired green card and their spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21.

We believe the above limited groups of people currently eligible for assistance from the Department are too narrow and restrict our ability to secure the safe departure of U.S. citizen family members, including their brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews, who are caught in the crossfire of this conflict. We urge the Department to quickly expand the categories of people eligible for this assistance to include, at a minimum, any American citizen's children, siblings, and sibling's spouses and children—regardless of marital status and age—as well as unmarried grandchildren under the age of 21.

In addition to the State Department submitting the information of those who seek to leave Gaza to the relevant authorities, we urge the Department of Homeland Security to expedite the review and adjudication of Gaza residents' applications for humanitarian parole in the United States, including for eligible persons that remain stuck in Gaza and are unable to physically appear in-person at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate for parole processing. For those in Gaza with an approved humanitarian parole application, we encourage the State Department to provide their names and information to the relevant Egyptian and Israeli authorities. It's critical to ensure that people who are eligible for humanitarian parole have ready access to this process and the protection it provides.

As a result of the dangerous circumstances on the ground, we urge you to quickly implement these changes in policy to help U.S. citizens and their family members get out of harm's way. We also request answers to the questions above by March 14, 2024, or sooner if able. We stand ready to work with you to help our constituents and their relatives depart Gaza safely.

Sincerely,



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



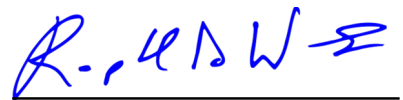
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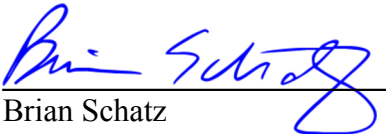
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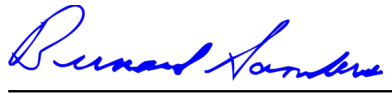
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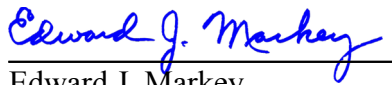
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