

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2026

The Honorable Markwayne Mullin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20528

Todd M. Lyons
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20536

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

The Honorable Joseph B. Edlow
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
5900 Capital Gateway Drive
Camp Springs, MD 20588

Dear Secretary Mullin, Secretary Rubio, Acting Director Lyons, and Director Edlow:

We write to urge the Trump administration to immediately institute protections for Iranian nationals currently in the United States who cannot return home safely. The Islamic Republic of Iran's brutal crackdown on nationwide protests earlier this year deepened the country's already-dire human rights crisis, while the recent U.S. military attack has intensified the security situation. The Administration must not forcibly return Iranian families in the United States to Iran—where they face the dual threat of the regime's humanitarian abuses and dangers a resumption of the war poses—and should therefore pause deportation flights and designate Iranians for temporary protection, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) or Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). The Administration should also provide assistance to Iranians in the United States while they are unable to return home, by resuming the processing of immigration benefits and expediting the issuance of work authorization documents. Failing to take these steps would place vulnerable Iranian families at serious risk and undermine the longstanding U.S. commitment to humanitarian protection.

For decades, the Islamic Republic regime has perpetrated extensive and grave human rights violations against its own citizens. Country conditions have been marked by religious persecution, gender-based violence, torture and disappearances, executions, and suppression of free speech.¹ The Islamic Republic regime's brutality escalated earlier this year when it met nationwide anti-government protests with unprecedented repression and violence. Over the course of two days in January 2026 alone, security forces killed thousands of protesters.² A

¹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026 (Feb. 2026), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/01/WR2026%20web_2.pdf.

² Kay A. Serjoie et. al, *Iran Protest Death Toll Could Top 30,000, According to Local Health Officials*, Time (Jan. 25, 2026), <https://time.com/7357635/more-than-30000-killed-in-iran-say-senior-officials/>.

credible U.S.-based human rights organization confirmed the killings of at least 7,000 civilians, with another 11,000 deaths under investigation.³ The Department of State has issued a “Level 4- Do not travel” advisory for Iran, citing “terrorism, unrest, kidnapping, arbitrary arrest of U.S. citizens, and wrongful detention.”⁴ An alarming surge in torture, mass detentions, and politically motivated executions endanger the lives of Iranian nationals, including those currently in the United States.

Moreover, on February 28, 2026, the Trump administration launched attacks on Iran unlawfully, without the constitutionally required congressional authorization, plunging millions of innocent civilians into a state of insecurity, with the human cost of the conflict mounting daily. A U.S. missile struck an elementary school in Iran on the first day of the conflict, killing 175 people, mostly children.⁵ For Iranians in our communities, the war has created a climate of profound fear and uncertainty.

Recently, President Trump urged Australia to provide asylum to members of the Iranian women’s soccer team and offered the players refuge in the United States should Australia decline to do so.⁶ But the Trump administration has denied this very same humanitarian support to the broader community of Iranians currently residing in the United States or seeking refuge from the regime and conflict. Since September of last year, the Administration has removed more than 100 Iranian nationals back to Iran, despite the country’s concerning human rights record.⁷ Following President Trump’s initial June 2025 travel ban that fully prohibited the entry of foreign nationals from twelve countries—including Iran—the President expanded these restrictions in January 2026 to exclude foreign nationals from other countries and to remove the prior exception allowing immediate relatives of U.S. citizens entry.⁸ These sweeping restrictions block nearly all immigrant and non-immigrant pathways for Iranians to enter the United States, separating many U.S. citizens from their Iranian family members.

The Trump administration has also recently accelerated its mistreatment of immigrants living in the United States through policies that exacerbate uncertainty and withhold critical and

³ *Id.*; Tess McClure & Deepa Parent, *Disappeared bodies, mass burials and ‘30,000 dead’: what is the truth of Iran’s death toll*, The Guardian (Jan. 27, 2026), <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/jan/27/iran-protests-death-toll-disappeared-bodies-mass-burials-30000-dead>.

⁴ Iran, U.S. Department of State (Dec. 4, 2025), <https://travel.state.gov/en/international-travel/travel-advisories/iran.html>.

⁵ Malachy Browne & John Ismay, *U.S. Tomahawk Hit Naval Base Beside Iranian School, Video Shows*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 10, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/08/world/middleeast/iran-minab-school-strike.html>.

⁶ Zolan Kanno-Youngs, *After Turning Away Refugees, Trump Presses to Protect Iranian Soccer Team*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 9, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/09/us/politics/iran-womens-soccer-team-asylum-trump.html>.

⁷ Letter from Sen. Tim Kaine et. al to Sec. Marco Rubio, U.S. Dep’t of State (Feb. 11, 2026), <https://www.kaine.senate.gov/press-releases/kaine-welch-lead-letter-pushing-administration-to-immediately-end-deportation-flights-to-iran>.

⁸ Restricting the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Protect the United States from Foreign Terrorists and Other National Security and Public Safety Threats, 90 Fed. Reg. 24497 (June 10, 2025), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/06/10/2025-10669/restricting-the-entry-of-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-united-states-from-foreign-terrorists-and>; Restricting and Limiting the Entry of Foreign Nationals To Protect the Security of the United States, 90 Fed. Reg. 59717 (Dec. 19, 2025), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/12/19/2025-23570/restricting-and-limiting-the-entry-of-foreign-nationals-to-protect-the-security-of-the-united-states>.

life-saving benefits. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued two policy memos—on December 2, 2025, and January 1, 2026—which prevent even the most routine processing of immigration benefits for any individual born in or holding citizenship from Iran and other travel-ban countries.⁹ Under this policy, Iranians who have been waiting to apply for citizenship, green cards, or work permits cannot secure access to these benefits. The memos also direct the government to review any immigration benefit—be it lawful permanent residency or temporary work authorization—provided to Iranians and other travel-ban country nationals who entered the United States during the Biden administration.¹⁰ On March 30, 2026, USCIS announced, without evidence or explanation, that the prior vetting and screening of nationals from travel ban countries was inadequate.¹¹ The Trump administration should immediately reverse these policies, which target applicants based solely on country of origin or nationality, bypass individualized review, trap hundreds of thousands of individuals, including Iranians, in limbo, and run contrary to U.S. interests and national security.

Policies that restrict, delay, or terminate the issuance of work authorization documents also threaten to destabilize the employment and livelihoods of Iranians and other individuals who have lawful status or humanitarian protection. On October 30, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) abruptly terminated the 540-day automatic extension previously available to applicants seeking to renew their employment authorization document (EAD).¹² Several months later, DHS published a proposed rule further restricting access to initial work authorization for asylum seekers.¹³ This proposed rule would double the mandatory wait period for initial work permits and categorically bar any applicant who entered the country between ports of entry, regardless of the validity of their asylum claim. Additionally, on December 5, 2025, USCIS severely curtailed the maximum validity period for EADs issued to refugees and asylees, slashing the duration from five years down to just 18 months.¹⁴ These policies eliminate the regulatory protections, place Iranians and other immigrants in severe harm the moment their

⁹ U.S. Citizenship & Immigr. Servs., Hold and Review of all Pending Asylum Applications and all USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from High-Risk Countries (Dec. 2, 2025), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-alerts/PM-602-0192-PendingApplicationsHighRiskCountries-20251202.pdf>; see also U.S. Citizenship & Immigr. Servs., Hold and Review of USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from Additional High-Risk Countries (Jan. 1, 2026), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-alerts/PM-602-0194-PendingApplicationsAdditionalHighRiskCountries-20260101.pdf>.

¹⁰ Dara Lind, *Trump Administration Responds to Tragedy By Putting Hundreds of Thousands of Legal Immigrants' Lives On Hold*, American Immigration Council (Dec. 4, 2025), <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/trump-administration-halts-immigration-benefits/>.

¹¹ U.S. Citizenship & Immigr. Servs., Update on USCIS' Strengthened Screening and Vetting (Mar. 30, 2026), <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/update-on-uscis-strengthened-screening-and-vetting>.

¹² Removal of the Automatic Extension of Employment Authorization Documents, 90 Fed. Reg. 48759 (Oct. 30, 2025), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/10/30/2025-19702/removal-of-the-automatic-extension-of-employment-authorization-documents>.

¹³ Employment Authorization Reform for Asylum Applicants, 91 Fed. Reg. 8616 (Feb. 23, 2026), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/02/23/2026-03595/employment-authorization-reform-for-asylum-applicants>.

¹⁴ U.S. Citizenship & Immigr. Servs., Updating Certain Employment Authorization Documents Validity Periods (Dec. 4, 2025), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-manual-updates/20251204-EmploymentAuthorizationValidity.pdf>.

EAD expires, weaponize administrative backlogs, and force vulnerable individuals into a state of instability. We urge the Administration to facilitate, rather than hinder, the ability of asylees and refugees to work, feed their families, and contribute to our society.

Given the current instability in Iran, the Administration should also immediately take affirmative steps to protect Iranian nationals currently residing in the United States. Having initiated the current war with Iran, the Trump administration bears a moral and humanitarian responsibility to provide Iranian nationals with an immediate shield from removal. For one, the Administration could heed prior calls by members of Congress to end deportation flights to Iran.¹⁵ Moreover, the Administration has the authority to designate Iran for TPS, a humanitarian designation that provides protection from removal for individuals from countries facing civil unrest, violence, or natural disasters. The Attorney General can designate a country for TPS if it is experiencing “an ongoing armed conflict” or “extraordinary and temporary conditions” that prevent its nationals from returning home safely.¹⁶ Therefore, without question, Iran would now qualify for this designation. Furthermore, while the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department retain their ability to make individualized immigration determinations, the Administration should not engage in blanket, wide-spread expulsions. Another avenue for relief, DED, allows the President to offer a temporary, administrative stay of removal to foreign nationals from designated areas.

Almost 12,000 Iranian international students are residing and studying in the United States, representing a significant population that would immediately benefit from a TPS or DED designation.¹⁷ Although the broader Iranian diaspora in the United States is estimated at more than half a million people, a substantial number of individuals maintain temporary status as students, exchange visitors, and temporary workers. Precarious conditions now define the lives of the Iranian community.¹⁸ Furthermore, after the Administration reached a deal with the Islamic Republic regime last year to coordinate the deportation of Iranian migrants, an estimated 2,500 Iranians face the threat of removal, a number that continues to grow as the Administration’s backlogs and USCIS policy shifts trap legally present individuals in a state of uncertainty.¹⁹ TPS and DED are humanitarian tools that would safeguard Iranians from the threats posed by the regime’s internal repression and the U.S. military operations inside Iran.

Providing Iranians with temporary refuge aligns with a long-standing American tradition of shielding vulnerable populations from danger abroad. In order to help us and the public better

¹⁵ Kaine, *supra* note 7; Press Release, Reps. Yassamin Ansari and Dave Min Release Statement Condemning New Deportations to Iran (Jan. 23, 2026), <https://ansari.house.gov/media/press-releases/reps-yassamin-ansari-and-dave-min-release-statement-condemning-new-deportations-to-iran>.

¹⁶ 8 U.S.C. § 1254a(b)(1)(A), (C).

¹⁷ Brooke Hauser, *For Iranian students studying in the US, every headline brings a slew of emotions: 'All I think about is freedom,'* Boston Globe (Mar. 7, 2026), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/03/07/metro/iranian-students-massachusetts-middle-east-war/>.

¹⁸ Amy Taxin et. al, *Iranian Americans fear for relatives in their homeland as war continues*, Associated Press (Mar. 3, 2026), <https://apnews.com/article/iranian-american-diaspora-us-7c8caccf669c34097caf1c74de0a40db>.

¹⁹ Farnaz Fassihi & Hamed Aleaziz, *U.S. Deports Paneload of Iranians After Deal with Tehran, Officials Say*, N.Y. Times (Sept. 30, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/30/world/middleeast/us-iran-deportation-flight.html>.

understand the Administration's stance towards Iranians in the United States, please provide written responses to the following questions no later than May 6, 2026:

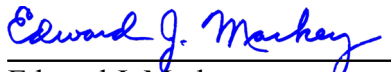
1. How does the Administration justify removing individuals to Iran at this time, given the State Department's designation of the country as "Level 4: Do Not Travel"?
2. Will the Administration commit to suspending removal flights to Iran until the country's designation level is downgraded?
3. Has the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of State taken any steps to evaluate whether Iran's current conditions warrant a TPS or DED designation? If so, what steps have been taken?
4. Before the Administration began deportation flights to Tehran last year, what guarantees did the Islamic Republic regime provide to the United States that returned individuals—in particular, historically persecuted groups such as the LGBTQ+ community—would not face persecution, execution, or torture?
5. Why did the Administration remove the prior travel ban exception allowing immediate relatives of U.S. citizens entry into the United States? Did the Administration consider whether to conduct a case-by-case assessment of threat risk for relatives of U.S. citizens? Will the Administration consider reinstating this exception given current events?
6. Following its January 1, 2026, policy memo preventing routine immigration processing for Iranians, what justification does USCIS provide for maintaining this pause on benefit requests? Has USCIS taken into consideration events since January 1, 2026, including the Islamic Republic regime's massacre of protesters or the U.S. attack on the country?
7. Since December 2025, (a) how many immigration benefit applications for Iranian nationals has USCIS paused?; (b) how many immigration benefit applications for Iranian nationals has USCIS processed?; (c) which application types for travel-ban country nationals has USCIS adjudicated?; and (d) to how many individuals has USCIS issued immigration benefit denials due to the applicant being from a "high risk country"?
8. The March 30, 2026 update from USCIS points to a comprehensive review of applications that determined that prior screening and vetting of foreign nationals from travel ban countries was inadequate. How many individuals of concern did USCIS identify in this review process? What negative information about these individuals did USCIS uncover? Please provide the complete results and documentation of this review.
9. What criteria is USCIS using to review anew any immigration benefits Iranian nationals received on or after January 20, 2021? Has USCIS complied with its 90-day timeline for issuing operational guidance and preparing a list of individuals for review, interview, re-

interview and referral to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)? If not, when does USCIS anticipate completing this review process and issuing guidance?


10. Given the changes that DHS and USCIS have made to the process for obtaining employment authorization documents, how is the Administration assisting Iranian workers who risk losing their jobs while awaiting adjudication? Will the Administration commit to reversing its policies that are making it harder for Iranians to maintain or obtain work authorization?

With hundreds of thousands of people displaced, as cities such as Tehran faced intense bombardment, the risk of return for Iranians in the United States is now more than ever a matter of life and death. We urge you to immediately resume processing immigration benefits for Iranian nationals present in the United States, and designate Iranians in the United States for TPS or DED to ensure that they are not forced back into the crossfire of warfare that is escalating across the Middle East. At this moment of heightened danger, the United States should ensure that Iranian nationals already in this country are protected from being returned to harm and are able to provide for their families and contribute to their communities while they are here.


Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Yassamin Ansari
Member of Congress


Cory A. Booker
United States Senator


Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator


Alex Padilla
United States Senator

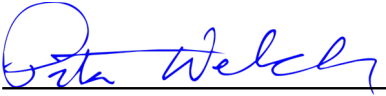

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



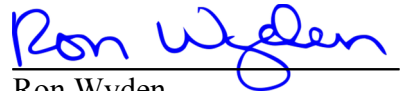
Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Dan Goldman
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress



Dave Min
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress



Lateefah Simon
Member of Congress