

Statement for the Record by the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS)

“Biden’s Afghan Parolee Program –

A Trojan Horse with Flawed Vetting and Deadly Consequences”

Senate Committee on Judiciary-Joint Subcommittee Hearing

January 14, 2026

For over 25 years, the [Center for Gender & Refugee Studies](https://cgrs.uclawsf.edu) (CGRS) has defended the human rights of refugees seeking asylum in the United States. We appreciate this opportunity to provide a statement for the record to assist the Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration and the Subcommittee on Crime and Counterterrorism examination of the Biden Administration’s parole processes for Afghans.

We are aware of the shortcomings of former President Biden’s approach to evacuating and resettling Afghan allies and others fleeing Taliban persecution. Those deficiencies should not be used as a pretext to attack access to asylum or roll back promising innovations to make the asylum process fairer and more efficient.

Tragedy as a Pretext for Indiscriminately and Indefinitely Curtailing Access to Asylum

The Trump Administration shamefully exploited the shooting death of National Guard Member Sarah Beckstrom to place all asylum applications filed by nationals of 19 countries on hold at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) pending further review and re-interview.¹ Not only is there no evidence the suspect in the National Guard shooting, an Afghan national granted asylum in April 2025, was improperly vetted at any point in his journey through the U.S. immigration system,² there is no evidence that additional vetting would have enabled the government to identify him as at risk of committing violent crime.

What the available evidence does indicate, however, is a failure to ensure access to professional evaluation and treatment in response to clear concerns about the suspect’s mental state and health that were raised multiple times.³ Using the suspect’s status as an asylee as a pretext to shut down access to asylum to a broad swath of refugees based solely on their nationality is a transparently cynical attempt to advance the administration’s racist attacks on the most vulnerable noncitizens while flouting federal law and binding international treaties. It must be rejected.

¹ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Policy Memorandum 602-0192, [*Hold and Review of all Pending Asylum Applications and all USCIS Benefit Applications Filed by Aliens from High-Risk Countries*](#) (Dec. 2, 2025).

² U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, [*“Durbin Questions Witnesses During Joint Judiciary Subcommittee Hearing On Vetting Afghan Nationals”*](#) (Jan. 15, 2026).

³ Edward Wong, et al., [*“A Volunteer’s Dire Warnings About the National Guard Shooting Suspect,”*](#) THE NEW YORK TIMES (Dec. 4, 2025).

Promising Innovations Should be Retained and Expanded

Also at risk are innovative processes USCIS implemented to efficiently adjudicate Afghan asylum claims in response to the Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2022⁴ and a 2023 settlement agreement.⁵ These processes included the systemic use of objective, professionally researched country conditions information to identify widespread patterns and practices of persecution⁶ in Afghanistan that would generally give rise to asylum eligibility for individuals associated with the targets of the persecution – especially those at risk because of their affiliation with the United States. For example, Afghan women, in particular, face well-documented threats of severe gender-based violence, along with a host of formal and informal economic and legal restrictions so severe as to amount to a near-complete exclusion from public life. They are in serious danger of religious persecution, as well as being targets for reprisal due to their roles as lawyers, judges, civil servants, journalists, and civil society actors under the prior government. In addition to country conditions information, streamlining adjudication tools also included providing asylum officers with examples of factual and legal determinations specific to Afghans.⁷ These tools enabled asylum officers to focus their resources on thorough background, identity, and security vetting rather than expend needless time hunting for duplicative evidence of the need for refugee protection.

Rather than being discarded, these innovations should be expanded to other populations of asylum applicants with a high likelihood of being recognized as refugees under a proper application of the law. USCIS' massive asylum backlog demands the scaling of such efficiency measures, helping to ensure those with clear protection needs do not face unnecessary delay in having their status officially recognized.

Conclusion

The Trump Administration has continually shown its disdain for the laws passed by Congress, especially those related to asylum and refugee protection. Tragedy should never be used as a pretext for targeting broad classes of vulnerable people, particularly those seeking life-saving protection in the United States. Congress must ensure that access to the asylum system is fully restored and that promising innovations to make the system more efficient in recognizing the refugee protection needs of those who clearly qualify are systematized and expanded. The American people are owed the respect of the laws passed by their elected representatives from executive branch officials sworn to uphold them. We call on Congress to use its considerable power under the Constitution to ensure nothing less.

⁴ Pub.L.No. 117-43 (generally requiring USCIS to interview certain Afghan asylum applicants within 45 days of receiving the application and adjudicate their applications within 150 days).

⁵ [Ahmed v. U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security](#), No. 4:23-cv-01892-JST (N.D. Cal. Sept. 11, 2023).

⁶ See 8 C.F.R. 208.13(b)(2)(iii).

⁷ See DHS Office of Inspector General, "[USCIS Has Generally Met Statutory Requirements to Adjudicate Asylum Applications from Paroled Afghan Evacuees](#)," OIG-23-40 (Aug. 18, 2023).