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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 10, 2024

Bojana Zoric Martinez
Director
Bureau of Refugee Programs
635 North 26th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Dear Ms. Martinez,

In recent weeks, I have once again been contacted by concerned constituents regarding reports of a significant refugee resettlement scheme underway in central Wisconsin. Unfortunately, as has been in the case with past resettlement initiatives, this effort appears to be moving forward with very little transparency or opportunity for local input.

Recent news reporting indicates that a non-governmental organization (NGO) is slated to bring 140 refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine into Marathon County before January 20¹ – the day President-elect Trump will be sworn into office. This decision is once again being treated as a foregone conclusion, it seems – one that has been allowed to proceed without any public forums for residents to voice concerns or ask basic questions.

Earlier this year, I wrote to you sharing similar concerns in connection with a planned resettlement in the Chippewa Valley. Then, like now, little if any effort appears to have been made to reach out directly to the public, or to analyze the potential strains it may place on local schools, public health infrastructure, housing availability, or social services. This disturbing pattern of behavior appears designed to deliberately keep the residents most likely to be harmed out of the loop and in the dark. It also runs counter to the intent of federal laws that require coordination on these matters.²

Like many Americans, I am also deeply skeptical of the casual claims often made by resettlement NGOs that all refugees undergo “extensive vetting” before they arrive in our communities. This claim strains credulity at best and is misleading at worst. For starters, the NGOs providing these assurances are not directly involved in the “extensive vetting” they are so eager to defend. Moreover, the agencies charged with conducting this screening are severely

¹ <https://www.thewausonian.com/p/wausau-news-ecdc-refugees>

² 8 USC 1522(a)(2)

hamstrung in their efforts given that “refugees” largely hail from countries that, by definition, are either completely failed states or governed by hopelessly corrupt or hostile regimes. The idea that American immigration authorities and NGOs can somehow call up the Taliban and politely ask them to vouch for the identity of an individual or provide us with their detailed criminal record isn’t just absurd, it defies common sense.

The dangerously lax track record of the outgoing Biden administration only heightens these well-founded fears. For example, one Customs and Border Protection official told CNN that the White House policy regarding the “vetting” of Afghan nationals in the wake of the chaotic collapse of Kabul was to “get as many people on the plane as you can, and we’ll sort out the [immigration visa] stuff later.” The official added that “[s]ome people have landed with no documents whatsoever.”³

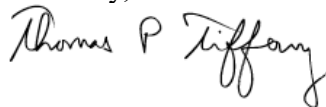
In my last letter, I asked you, as the State official responsible for refugee resettlement, to coordinate open public input sessions *before* these kinds of resettlement initiatives begin, not to simply provide a cursory notification *after* these decisions have already been made behind closed doors. I did so because local officials received so little advance notice about plans to house thousands of Afghans at Fort McCoy in 2021 – many of whom went on to commit crimes ranging from theft and assault⁴ to domestic violence and sexual abuse of minors.⁵ Others simply walked out of the installation before any basic screening was even conducted.⁶

Ms. Martinez, local communities deserve a meaningful say in the resettlement process. They deserve transparency regarding who is coming, where they are coming from, and a detailed assessment about what it might mean for their neighborhoods, classrooms, emergency services, social safety net programs, and pocketbooks.

I hope you will consider taking steps to expand the public dialogue to ensure that Wisconsinites have the final word on what happens in their towns, and that you will be forthcoming about this and other proposed resettlement plans that may be under development or consideration.

Thank you in advance for your favorable consideration, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Tom Tiffany
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/25/politics/arriving-afghans-paperwork-delays-security/index.html>

⁴ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/apr/18/culture-shock-afghan-evacuees-run-afoul-of-us-laws/>

⁵ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/sep/23/afghan-evacuees-us-military-base-charged-domestic-/>

⁶ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/aug/28/feds-cant-keep-afghans-escaping-us-bases-they-can-/>