

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 17, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human
Services 200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 2020

Dear Secretaries Mayorkas, Austin, Blinken, and Becerra,

We write to request more information and elevate the concerns of our state, as we seek to assist Task Force McCoy and Operation Allies Welcome in providing the best possible care and support for Afghan guests. Specifically, we request the establishment of lines of communication between the Administration, Task Force McCoy and State of Wisconsin agencies; a surge in medical resources available to address basic medical care, the needs of the pediatric population, as well as individuals who are currently pregnant; and additional resources to address vaccination efforts.

Over the last two months, the Biden Administration conducted the largest airlift in U.S. history, successfully evacuating more than 124,000 people from Afghanistan—a herculean humanitarian effort. Many of these evacuees have experienced significant trauma during their evacuation. We must now focus on ensuring that our guests have what they need to live comfortably as they transition through the resettlement process, and that officials at Fort McCoy and in the state of Wisconsin have everything that they need to do their jobs.

At this time, we continue to hear concerns about the existing communication channels between officials at Fort McCoy, officials within the administration, and officials working in our state government and health care system who are trying to best support those in direct contact with refugees. Specifically, we have heard requests for more direct contact information for various point persons at Fort McCoy that can respond to inquiries associated with social services, interpreters, medical transport, and medical needs. Additionally, we have also heard concerns about the situation at Fort McCoy from local groups working to support federal and state efforts to meet the basic needs of these guests.

Further, given our continued response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the conditions under which our guests were evacuated, we must place particular focus on the health needs of this

population. Northern Wisconsin struggles with existing shortages of obstetricians and gynecologists. We understand that refugees at Fort McCoy have access to basic prenatal care, however, in some instances more specialized care may be necessary. And, while we applaud the administration's efforts to provide COVID-19 vaccines for refugees, 90 percent of whom have now been vaccinated, we understand that individuals must also undergo other routine immunizations as a part of their resettlement process. States can request vaccines for children through the existing Vaccines for Children (VFC) program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), however this is limited to permanent residents of the state, and there is no adult equivalent of the VFC.

Fort McCoy is well positioned and uniquely capable of temporarily housing this large population and have done tremendous work in responding to this emergency situation. It is now essential that they have everything they need to move forward with processing our guests for resettlement in Wisconsin and around the country. One major impediment to this process is initial medical screenings at Fort McCoy and availability of regular vaccinations that are required as part of their immigration status. We are confident that with improved communication and coordination with Wisconsin state agencies and local health systems, along with streamlined points of contact, especially as it relates to immediate health needs, we will see a reduction in processing time and an expeditious solution to some of the challenges we face. Specifically, we request that you regularly update state and local health officials on Task Force medical needs, staffing availability, and demographic information to improve the medical readiness of the Task Force and the local health care system. Additionally, we strongly encourage you to surge any and all available medical resources through the interagency to assist in providing basic and contingent medical needs on Fort McCoy to reduce the potential strain on the regional health system. Many local hospitals are experiencing capacity issues due to recent spikes in COVID-19 cases.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Ron Kind
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Gwen Moore
Member of Congress