

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

January 19, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our deep disappointment with the Department's continued failure to reimburse the Northern Virginia Emergency Response System (NVERS) for \$687,298.38 in critical services rendered more than two years ago during the evacuation of Afghans to the United States.

In August 2021, NVERS, a non-profit partnership of Northern Virginia local governments, hospitals, and the Commonwealth of Virginia was called on by the State Department to provide vital support services – with no advance coordination – for Americans and Afghan evacuees fleeing Afghanistan. The United States would eventually welcome more than 115,000 Afghans to the United States, with Northern Virginia serving as one of the two primary points of entry for most evacuees.

Due to the lack of a coordinated federal response during the initial stages of the evacuation, federal agencies including the State Department relied heavily on NVERS to address a multitude of unforeseen gaps. This included triage and distribution of evacuees from Dulles International Airport and federal transfer points to Northern Virginia hospitals, tracking of patients and assisting with family reunifications, transportation for discharged patients back to federal transfer points, provision of on-demand translation services to facilitate communication between Afghan evacuees and medical staff, and logistics management for humanitarian services at Dulles Airport. The expenses incurred by this emergency support were significant.

NVERS stepped in immediately to facilitate support to the federal response, at a time when hospitals throughout the region were already stretched to the breaking point due to the prevalence of the Delta variant of the coronavirus. As a result of NVERS' support, the region's emergency medical services units and hospitals were able to sustain the sudden and prolonged patient load, and provide appropriate care as evacuees traveled first through our communities, ahead of permanent resettlement across the nation.

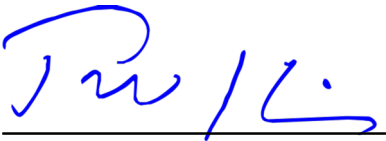
The failure of the State Department and the other federal agencies to make any serious effort to reimburse NVERS for these services is outrageous, and risks disincentivizing community entities nationwide from offering support in future scenarios. Had NVERS not stepped in to address gaps in the haphazard initial federal response to the evacuation, Northern Virginia's already strained health care delivery system would have struggled to respond to an

unprecedented evacuation in the middle of the pandemic. We have repeatedly engaged the Department in private on this issue on behalf of NVERS; for the Department to suggest to us that NVERS acted unilaterally in delivering these critical services and is therefore not entitled to reimbursement, while failing to offer any meaningful suggestions to remedy the situation, completely overlooks the Department's own shortcomings in creating this unfunded mandate.

Even after failing to compensate NVERS for its role at the beginning of the Afghan evacuation, the Department again requested assistance from NVERS in February 2023, to support 222 Nicaraguan political prisoners who arrived at Dulles after being suddenly expelled by the Nicaraguan regime. We are immensely proud that Northern Virginia's exceptional health care providers, through coordination led by NVERS, continues to meet the challenges of responding to such unforeseen emergencies. But given the Department's continued reliance on these services, we ask that you take immediate action to reimburse NVERS, or articulate other potential solutions to make NVERS whole as soon as possible.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

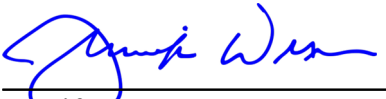
Sincerely,



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



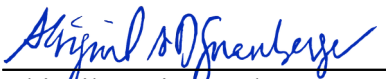
Mark R. Warner
United States Senator




Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Abigail Davis Spanberger
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services