

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 13, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Robert J. Fenton, Jr.
Senior Response Official
Unified Coordination Group
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Mr. Fenton:

We write today to urge increased coordination and improved communication with Virginia localities and institutions that are assisting with Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), and to reiterate concerns that our offices have received about the resources and level of support that the federal government is providing to these local communities and entities.

As we've traveled throughout the Commonwealth, we have heard from citizens and local elected officials alike that their communities are honored to participate in this historic and worthy operation. From arrival at Dulles International Airport to housing and processing at the Dulles Expo Center, Fort Lee, Fort Pickett, and Marine Corps Base Quantico, the United States would have been unable to shelter and care for these refugees as quickly without the resources provided by the Commonwealth.

Virginians continue to work to support Operation Allies Welcome at all levels. The Commonwealth and many localities have generously offered resources, and we have no doubt that Virginians will continue to assist however they are able.

We are encouraged by efforts that officials have taken to coordinate at the local level, including Secretary Mayorkas' call with local officials, outreach from military leaders to the communities around their installations, and the establishment of local coordinating officials on military bases. These efforts facilitate communication and help address concerns that local communities may have, and most critically, help align state and local resources to complement and support the federal government's efforts.

We continue to believe, however, that the federal government – specifically the departments and agencies that are coordinating and running OAW on the ground – must do more to develop clear and explicit lines of communication, acknowledge the concerns and questions of local communities, and coordinate the operation so that states and localities can effectively support and backstop the operation with minimal disruption.

We remain concerned about the impacts that insufficient coordination and communication have had so far, especially related to healthcare operations in Northern Virginia. We again urge, to the greatest extent possible, full coordination with local officials and entities who can help manage the logistics and balance resources on behalf of local communities.

We would also like to reiterate concerns related to local capacity to assist the federal government, and in turn, the federal government's ability to support local communities in these efforts. Our offices have previously raised these concerns with OAW personnel. In particular, we are seeking answers to the following:

1. **Military installation medical capacity.** On August 25th, the Department of Defense authorized the use of Marine Corps Base Quantico and Fort Pickett as part of the Department's support of this operation, with announced capacities of 5,000 and 10,000 individuals, respectively. This was in addition to the existing capacity at Fort Lee.
 - a. What are the current and anticipated medical capabilities and capacities at each of these installations? What degree of care is OAW able to provide entirely on-base, without needing to access health resources in local communities?
 - b. What steps is OAW taking to surge these capabilities and capacities, to bring in additional personnel and resources from other installations and locations, and to safely provide as much quality medical care on-base as possible? What efforts is OAW making to offer specialty care, including, in particular, prenatal and obstetric care?
2. **Support for local communities' medical capacity.** Nationwide and in Virginia, hospitals and health centers are struggling due to ongoing challenges related to COVID-19, staffing shortages, and other serious medical capacity concerns. Hospitals and health providers in the areas surrounding these bases have indicated that they are already near capacity, given these pandemic and staffing constraints.
 - a. What support or assistance is OAW currently providing to states, localities, and local hospitals and health providers – whether supplies, resources, funding, staffing, or otherwise – to help them manage the additional demands from increased populations in their regions? Is there further assistance available that these entities should be availing themselves of to help meet demand?
 - b. What contingency plans are in place for providing appropriate medical care if local hospitals and community health providers reach full capacity? Please include contingencies both for OAW to provide appropriate care to Afghan individuals and families, and for the federal government to help local communities expand their ability to provide appropriate care to members of their communities.
3. **COVID-19 vaccine.** Please clarify the official policy with regard to Afghan individuals and families receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, including the timing of the vaccine being required relative to their entering the U.S. What efforts are underway to speed up vaccinations and to administer vaccines earlier with respect to the arrival of Afghans into the U.S.?

We appreciate the efforts that you and the dedicated men and women of your workforce have made during this historic operation. We also commend states and localities around the country for their efforts to support this mission, and the pride with which they have done so.

So that this operation can run with the safety and efficiency that it requires, and that all associated individuals and families deserve, we urge you to ensure that OAW is operating as a constructive partner to states and localities, and to make sure these states and localities have the support and resources that they require to meet both their needs, and the extraordinary aims of this operation. Should your agency have any questions or an immediate response to the concerns outlined, please contact our staff at Zach_Lewis@warner.senate.gov and Ausan_AlEryanI@kaine.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator



TIM KAINE
United States Senator

Cc:

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense

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