

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 24, 2020

The Honorable Ken Cuccinelli
Acting Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20001

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 2:26 pm, Dec 18, 2020

Dear Acting Director Cuccinelli,

As the Chair and Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and Nonproliferation, we write to you today to express our concern regarding the significant number of Uyghur asylum seekers residing in the United States, many of whom have waited years for asylum interviews through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), to protect this vulnerable group from persecution by the Chinese government.

There are currently between 350 and 400 cases of Uyghurs applying for asylum through USCIS—some of which date back to 2014. Many wish to send their children to school or to serve in the military and are unable to regain a sense of normalcy after fleeing persecution in China. Others suffer from psychological trauma given their inability to speak to family members abroad and their separation from family living in Turkey and elsewhere.

Uyghurs are a Turkic ethnic group living primarily in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (XUAR) and have fled China for many years in response to growing ethnic and religious persecution. Starting in 2016, the Chinese government intensified widespread and systematic policies to repress Uyghurs on the basis of their religious and ethnic identity. Human rights abuses include enforced disappearances, destruction of cultural sites, forced labor, disproportionate rates of prison incarceration, and coercive birth control policies.

Between 1 and 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples have been detained in internment camps and subjected to a program of political indoctrination. Leaked government documents have shown that one of the primary reasons for detention in these camps has been travel overseas or maintaining connections abroad. Given these circumstances, all Uyghurs residing abroad without documentation remain particularly vulnerable and at risk of return to China. It is now a certainty that upon return, Uyghurs would be immediately detained and subject to widespread rights abuses.

These risks are compounded by the fact that the Chinese government has been reluctant to renew passports to Uyghurs abroad to force them back to China. The inability to obtain passports and other documentation add to the difficulties faced by Uyghurs, leading to possible statelessness if no government steps in to fill the gap.

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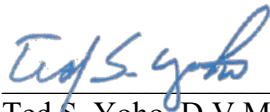
Although we recognize that thousands face similar barriers and long wait times with USCIS, the Uyghur population is uniquely vulnerable. Uyghurs are also unable to obtain necessary documents from the Chinese government given the hostility coming from Beijing towards Uyghurs both inside and outside the country.

We are appreciative of the unprecedented steps taken in response to escalating abuses, including signing the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, the imposition of Global Magnitsky sanctions against Chinese companies complicit in human rights abuses, and recent actions by U.S. Customs and Border Protection in response to Chinese goods manufactured with forced labor.

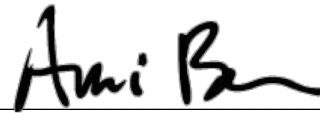
While we applaud these positive steps, we respectfully ask for further action to support the Uyghur community and call USCIS to take steps to expedite the adjudication of asylum claims of Uyghurs residing in the United States to protect this group from threats and persecution abroad and ensure that they are granted access to public services.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to receiving your response on this matter.

Sincerely,



Ted S. Yoho, D.V.M.
Member of Congress



Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

February 23, 2021

The Honorable Ami Bera
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Bera:

Thank you for your August 24, 2020 letter expressing support for members of the Uyghur community who are residing and seeking asylum in the United States.

We continue to adjudicate asylum applications as expeditiously as possible. While U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to seek to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, we note that the asylum division staff is devoted to working on all asylum-related cases. The offices have instituted innovative technological processes to allow operations to resume while keeping staff and the public safe since resuming asylum interviews following the pandemic-caused temporary closures to the public in 2020. However, these health and safety measures have decreased the interviewing capacity of asylum officers.

USCIS prioritizes the most recently filed asylum applications when scheduling asylum interviews. Urgent requests to be scheduled for an interview may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Requests for expedited processing on individual asylum applications should be submitted in writing to the asylum office with jurisdiction over the application. The USCIS Service and Office Locator page has contact information for all asylum offices.¹ Likewise, individuals with pending asylum applications may apply for advance parole to facilitate travel by submitting Form I-131, Application for Travel Document, in accordance with the instructions found on the USCIS website.

USCIS does not waive asylum regulations for groups or individuals. Our website provides information about the exceptions to certain regulatory requirements for asylum or for employment authorization based on a pending asylum application that are required pursuant to a court order.²

¹ For additional information, see <https://egov.uscis.gov/office-locator/#/>.

² For additional information, see <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-and-asylum/> and <https://www.uscis.gov/i-765>.

The Honorable Ami Bera

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Thank you again for your letter. Should you require any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tracy L. Renaud". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Tracy L. Renaud
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director