

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2019

The Honorable Secretary Michael Pompeo
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Acting Secretary Kevin McAleenan
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Acting Secretary McAleenan,

We write to urge you to extend for 18 months and redesignate Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Syrians in the United States. The decision, due by August 1, 2019,¹ would protect the current 7,000 Syrian TPS holders as well as Syrians who arrived after August 1, 2016 and would benefit from redesignation.

Congress passed legislation to create TPS in 1990 and in doing so codified our country's commitment to the international principle of *non-refoulement*, meaning the United States must not return people to countries where their lives or freedom would be at stake.² Armed conflict and extraordinary conditions prevail in Syria, making safe return impossible. These conditions and circumstances similarly apply to Syrians who have recently fled the country, underscoring the necessity and urgency for both an extension and redesignation of TPS for Syrians.

The Assad regime continues to commit atrocities, which were the cause for Syria's original TPS designation,³ and crimes against humanity, including arbitrary arrests, torture, and executions.⁴ At least 128,000 people remain unaccounted for after disappearing into Syrian government prisons.⁵ The regime and its allies are currently waging a brutal military campaign in Idlib province,⁶ home to three million people, more than half of which are internally displaced.⁷ In May 2019, a Syrian war monitor reported that 5,400 airstrikes killed 316 people,⁸ and 61 children in airstrikes since April.⁹

¹ INA § 244 (b)(3)(A); 83 Fed. Reg. 9329 (March 5, 2018), www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/03/05/2018-04454/extension-of-the-designation-of-syria-for-temporary-protected-status.

² Jill Wilson, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*, Congressional Research Service (March 29, 2019), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS20844>.

³ 77 Fed. Reg. 19026 (March 29, 2012), www.federalregister.gov/documents/2012/03/29/2012-7498/designation-of-syrian-arab-republic-for-temporary-protected-status.

⁴ *Syria: Events of 2018*, Human Rights Watch (2019), www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/syria.

⁵ Anne Barnard, *What We Know About Syria's Secret Torture Prisons*, The New York Times (May 11, 2019), www.nytimes.com/2019/05/11/world/middleeast/syria-torture-practices.html.

⁶ *Latest Idlib offensive threatens 'unprecedented humanitarian disaster'*, Refugees International (May 6, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/latest-idlib-offensive-threatens-unprecedented-humanitarian-disaster>.

⁷ Bethan McKernan, *'Every day brings a new massacre': Eid offers no respite for Idlib*, The Guardian (June 4, 2019), www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/04/every-day-brings-new-massacre-eid-offers-no-respite-idlib-syria.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *No funeral for children killed in Idlib as death toll rises*, Save the Children (June 4, 2019), <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/no-funeral-children-killed-idlib-death-toll-rises>.

According to The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA), 13 million people are in need of humanitarian aid in Syria.¹⁰ The Assad regime continues its practice of weaponizing basic human needs, bombing food convoys, health care facilities, and places of worship.¹¹ USAID reports that 11.7 million Syrians need food assistance in 2019, with 9 million facing emergency food insecurity.¹² Approximately 6.5 million people are facing “life-threatening food insecurity.”¹³ The Assad regime and its allies carried out a verified 566 attacks on medical facilities in Syria.¹⁴ There have been 890 documented killings of medical professionals,¹⁵ 90 percent attributed to Assad or allies.¹⁶

The United Nations continues to warn that “safe, voluntary and dignified return” is not possible at this time.¹⁷ Rates of forced return and deportation to Syria from neighboring countries, a violation of international law, are on the rise.¹⁸ In addition to deportation, there is great concern that Syrians will continue to return “voluntarily” due to a false sense of security based on inflated returnee numbers.¹⁹ Furthermore, Assad and allies are engaged in a propaganda campaign, calling on Syrians to return as part of a political effort to legitimize the government.²⁰ Analysts predict that decisions to return to Syria based on false information and perceptions will continue to increase, putting more lives at risk.²¹

Moreover, Syrian TPS holders and their families are taxpayers who contribute significantly to local communities and businesses. They have contributed to the economic, social, and civic wellbeing of the United States. Should the Department of Homeland Security allow Syrian TPS designations to expire, it would force recipients and their families to make a nearly impossible choice about whether to return to dangerous conditions or stay in the United States and risk deportation. Ending TPS would harm not only the recipients but their U.S.-born children, their families, their employers, and the millions of people in and around their communities whose lives they touch.

¹⁰ *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019*, UNOCHA (2019), www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO2019.pdf.

¹¹ For e.g., *SAMS alarmed by heightened attacks on civilian infrastructure in northwest Syria*, Syrian American Medical Society (June 11, 2019), www.sams-usa.net/press_release/sams-alarmed-by-heightened-attacks-on-civilian-infrastructure-in-northwest-syria/; *Syria's war: NGOs suspend aid to embattled Idlib province*, Al Jazeera (May 11, 2019), www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/syria-war-ngos-suspend-aid-embattled-idlib-province-190511093135241.html.

¹² *Food assistance fact sheet*, USAID (April 24, 2019), www.usaid.gov/syria/food-assistance.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *The Syrian Conflict: Eight Years of Devastation and Destruction of the Health System*, Physicians for Human Rights (March 12, 2019), <https://phr.org/resources/the-syrian-conflict-eight-years-of-devastation-and-destruction-of-the-health-system/>.

¹⁵ *Medical Personnel are Targeted in Syria*, Physicians for Human Rights (2019), <https://phr.org/resources/medical-personnel-are-targeted-in-syria/>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019*, UNOCHA (2019), www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO2019.pdf.

¹⁸ Jesse Marks, *Why Syrian refugees are at risk of a forced return to Syria*, The Washington Post (Feb. 13, 2019), www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/02/12/syrian-refugees-face-growing-pressure-to-return-to-insecure-conditions-heres-why/?utm_term=.64538974272b.

¹⁹ Jesse Marks, *Why Syrian refugees are at risk of a forced return to Syria*, The Washington Post (Feb. 13, 2019), www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2019/02/12/syrian-refugees-face-growing-pressure-to-return-to-insecure-conditions-heres-why/?utm_term=.64538974272b; *TIMEP Brief: The Return of Refugees*, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (March 18, 2019), <https://timep.org/reports-briefings/timep-brief-return-of-refugees/>.

²⁰ *Id.*

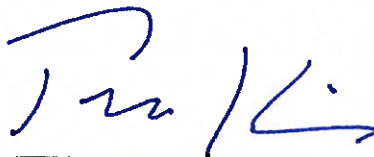
²¹ *TIMEP Brief: The Return of Refugees*, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (March 18, 2019), <https://timep.org/reports-briefings/timep-brief-return-of-refugees/>.

We urge you to extend and redesignate TPS for Syrians. We look forward to action from your office before July 31, 2019.

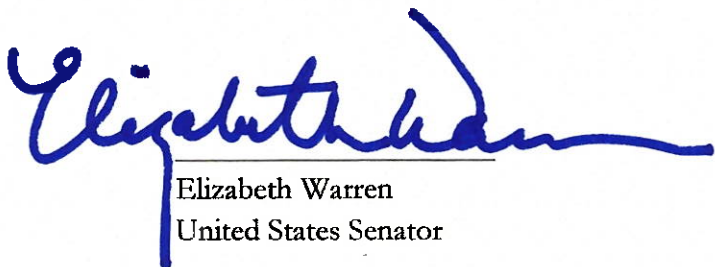
Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



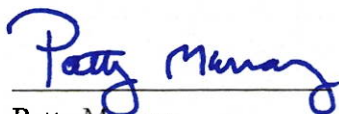
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



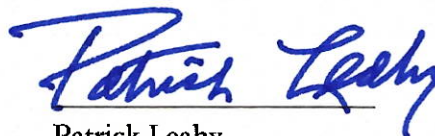
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



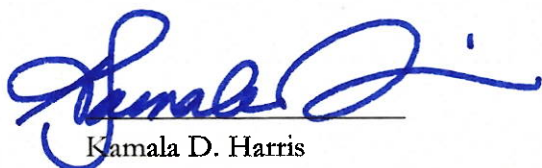
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator




Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



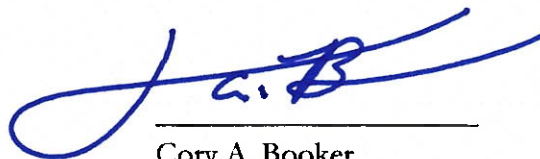
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator

Tina Smith
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

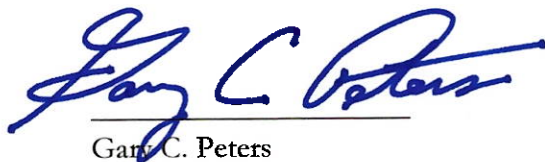
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator