

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 30, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to you today deeply concerned about the future of Afghanistan following the unjustifiable cancellation of secondary school for Afghan girls. While we are not surprised that the Taliban has once again dismissed the rights of girls and young women, we are alarmed by the implications of their decision for 50 percent of the population and the future of Afghanistan. To this end, we urge you to convey clear consequences to the Taliban for their actions, and take immediate steps to bolster support for Afghan women and girls.

The U.S., international community and most importantly, the young women of Afghanistan welcomed last month's announcement by Taliban officials that secondary schools would be reopened for all Afghan students, including girls. Across Afghanistan, girls showed up to school last Wednesday, excited by the opportunity to learn again. Instead of open classrooms and welcoming teachers, they were met with locked doors and closed gates. Sadly, denying girls a full education reflects the Taliban's broader assault on women's rights and freedom. Since the Taliban's overthrow of the legitimate government of Afghanistan in August 2021, Afghanistan's women and girls have suffered. Women have been banned from most jobs, are required to be accompanied by a male relative and are restricted in where they can travel. When women protest this treatment, they are arrested, beaten and disappeared.

Despite the consequences, the women of Afghanistan have demonstrated bravery in contending the Taliban's draconian rules. We have seen young women and girls bravely protest the closure of their schools, demanding dignity and human rights. The United States must lead the international community in supporting these women in their continued struggle for human rights and basic freedoms.

To this end, there must be clear consequences for the Taliban's disregard of the rights of women and girls and the will of the Afghan people. We welcome your decision to suspend engagements with the Taliban over the reversal of the Taliban's promise to allow Afghan girls to attend secondary school. We urge you to use the tools at your disposal—including reinstating travel bans under the United Nations Security Council sanctions regime—to clearly convey to the Taliban that anything short of full education for girls and women is unacceptable to the United States, our allies and the Afghan people.

Second, we stand ready to work with you to take every step necessary to support the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls, including access to quality primary, secondary and tertiary education. The U.S. must work with our partners and allies to ensure that the international community does not lose focus on the needs of Afghan women and girls. U.S. leadership here is

crucial, and we must live up to our own commitments under the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy. For the past two decades, the U.S. has been the leader of international involvement in Afghanistan. We must continue to show the world that we are prioritizing the rights of Afghan women and girls, or we cannot expect our allies to do so.

Further, we must engage the women of Afghanistan as our partners in mobilizing the provision of food assistance, maternal and child health needs and education, not only for women and girls but for all Afghans. The humanitarian crisis has crippled Afghanistan and left 95 percent of Afghans hungry. In the face of such unprecedented strife, it is the Afghan women who have developed assistance networks and communal groups to support their families and communities. The U.S. and the international community must tackle any obstacles to engaging women activists and fully empower women's groups in decision-making and programming to funnel assistance to those who need it most.

Over the past two decades, the women of Afghanistan have fought to rebuild their country as a society that allows them to prosper and thrive. This move by the Taliban threatens to undo that progress. The decision to continue to deny girls access to secondary education is a clear signal that the Taliban's ideology toward women rights remains unchanged from when they ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001.

This is an urgent policy and moral prerogative and we look forward to working with you to ensure all Afghan children have access to a complete education regardless of gender, location or ethnicity.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



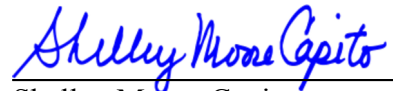
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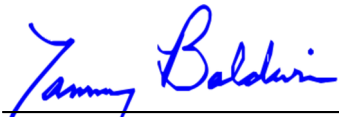
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United States Senator



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United States Senator



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United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
United States Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C. 20523

The Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Permanent Representative
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017