

April 12th, 2021

**Statement to the Committee on the Judiciary's
Markup Hearing on H.R. 1333,
the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination
for Nonimmigrants Act or the NO BAN Act**

Chairman Jerrold Nadler, Ranking Member Jim Jordan, and members of the Judiciary Committee, the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) is pleased to take this opportunity to publicly support the National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants (NO BAN) Act reintroduced this year by Representative Judy Chu (D-CA).

For your background, PAAIA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves the interests of Iranian Americans and represents the community before U.S. policymakers and the American public. Today there are more than an estimated 1.5 million Iranian Americans living in the United States. Iranian Americans are among some of the most successful immigrant communities in the U.S. – serving in law enforcement, the military, government, and elected office. In the most recent election, we proudly observed the historic election of the first Iranian American elected to U.S. Congress and many more to state and local offices across the country. In addition to being strong public servants, Iranian Americans are highly educated, founders and/or senior leaders at many major U.S. companies, and engage in and give back to the communities in which they live. Further, a study by the Small Business Administration (SBA) found Iranian Americans to be among the top 20 immigrant groups with the highest rate of business ownership, contributing substantially to the U.S. economy.

While Iranian Americans are proud contributors to American culture, business, science, the arts, and public service, we remain deeply connected to family back in Iran. According to a 2020 survey by PAAIA, 91 percent of respondents have family in Iran. This is largely due to the fact that we are a relatively new and young immigrant community, many of whom fled Iran during the 1979 Islamic Revolution and put down roots in the United States.

With the majority of Iranian Americans between the ages of 25 and 64, there are countless times – from weddings and graduations to education and careers – when travel between Iran and the United States is necessary. Yet, when the Travel Ban was in place, I was regularly contacted by people within our community who were unjustly separated from loved ones. In fact, PAAIA's 2019 survey of Iranian Americans revealed that 70 percent of respondents described the impact of the Travel Ban as either very or somewhat significant on themselves personally or on their Iranian American family and friends.

For years, the Trump administration's Travel Ban hung over our community like a dark cloud – unjustly separating families and loved ones and encouraging a dramatic rise in hate crimes and further discrimination directed at Iranian Americans. This includes the detention of hundreds of Iranian Americans by U.S. Customs and Border Protection on the Washington State/Canadian border in January 2020. During this time, our community was forced to put our priorities on hold to mount a near-impossible defense against the ban while also protecting our people from the xenophobia that went hand-in-hand with this senseless policy.

The immediate rescission of the Travel Ban by the current administration was a moment that Iranian Americans and other impacted communities celebrated. But what is there to reassure our community that this discriminatory policy can never be put in place again? The NO BAN Act does exactly that, which is why its passage is critical.

PAAIA commends Rep. Chu for her leadership in introducing the NO BAN Act and the members of the House Judiciary Committee for their work pushing this bill to the House floor. The legislation is a meaningful and practical step forward for the Iranian American community and others that were targeted under the Travel Ban. The NO BAN Act will amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to make it more difficult for future administrations to enact similar policies and prevent religious-based discrimination of anyone seeking entry into the United States. The legislation would also require that Congress, through its appropriate committees, be routinely notified and briefed on the status, implementation and authority of the executive branch's actions pertaining to immigration and travel bans issued on the basis of national security and human rights. In sum, the NO BAN Act will ensure that our painful history cannot be repeated by putting in place substantive criteria and accountability to safeguard against potential abuses of power.

While the legislation allows the executive branch to bar the entry of individuals or groups for the benefit of national security or health emergencies, it ensures that there is verifiable evidence in support of such claims. In doing so, this legislation eliminates partisan lines by codifying congressional oversight on immigration-related executive decisions of any administration.

The toll of the Travel Ban was devastating. The ban undercut a core American value – strong families – and punished millions of people without any clear U.S. national security rationale. In order for our country to move forward, and not take steps in the opposite direction, we must take immediate steps to pass the NO BAN Act. I thank Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Jordan and members of the Committee for the opportunity to share this perspective and encourage broad support for the NO BAN Act.

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