

ANN WAGNER

2ND DISTRICT, MISSOURI

2350 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-1621

301 SOVEREIGN COURT
SUITE 201
BALLWIN, MO 63011
(636) 779-5449

wagner.house.gov

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2502

VICE RANKING MEMBER
COMMITTEE ON
FINANCIAL SERVICES

RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY AND
INCLUSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTOR PROTECTION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND CAPITAL MARKETS

VICE RANKING MEMBER
COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN AFFAIRS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA,
ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC,
AND NONPROLIFERATION

September 7, 2021

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

Secretary Blinken,

I write with deep concern regarding the recent reports of alleged forced marriage and sexual abuse of Afghan child refugees during the inexcusably chaotic evacuation from Afghanistan. It is our responsibility to ensure that every single child under the care of the United States government is protected from sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and the State Department must take all necessary action to protect these vulnerable minors.

As you know, on September 3, 2021, the Associated Press published a report stating that United States officials have “identified numerous incidents” of suspected forced marriage among Afghan girls and older male refugees. Specifically, the report outlines how multiple U.S. officials have raised concerns that “young Afghan girls had been forced into marriages in order to escape Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover,” and many of these “child brides” are being housed at Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. Moreover, it is reported that these young girls have suffered rape and sexual assault by the men they were forced to marry in order to flee the Taliban. The horror that these young girls are enduring is absolutely unacceptable and illegal. Any individual who knowingly entices, harbors, or transports a minor and forces the minor to engage in sexual activity is committing human trafficking, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1591.

As Vice Ranking Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, I have championed bipartisan efforts to address the horrific practice of child marriage. On December 20, 2019, my bill, the *Preventing Child Marriage in Displaced Populations Act*, was signed into law as part of the fiscal year 2020 appropriations package. This law directs the United States to lead international efforts in crafting a comprehensive strategy to address child marriages in UN-administered refugee settlements. As the United States takes the lead in the multilateral fight to end child marriage, we must extend the same efforts to the Afghan children taking refuge on our soil. The State Department as well as the Biden Administration as a whole must take direct and immediate action to save these girls from exploitation and abuse.

In order to guarantee the safety of these vulnerable children, I request the following information:

- 1) A full accounting of the number of children under U.S. care that are suspected to be the victims of forced marriage and/or sexual assault, including the ages and locations of these children.
- 2) The State Department's plan for determining whether or not a child was forcibly married and is a victim of human trafficking, given the lack of clear documentation.
- 3) The State Department's plan for ensuring the safety and security of the children married against their will.

Given the gravity of this situation, I look forward to receiving your detailed response as well as addressing this issue with you in person when you testify before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on September 13, 2021.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Wagner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Ann Wagner

Member of Congress