

March 22, 2018

The Honorable John Kelly
Chief of Staff
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable John Sullivan
Acting Secretary
Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear General Kelly and Acting Secretary Sullivan,

We, the undersigned Iranian-American organizations write with the utmost concern regarding the administration's clear political and discriminatory targeting of civil servant Sahar Nowrouzadeh. Career public servants are afforded protections against politically-motivated firings, and numerous protections have made it illegal for workers both inside and outside the government to be fired on behalf of their race, heritage, or religion.

On March 15, 2018, the ranking members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Elijah Cummings, and House Foreign Affairs Committee, Eliot Engel, sent a letter on this subject to the White House Chief of Staff, General John F. Kelly, and the Deputy Secretary of State, John J. Sullivan. In their letter, they revealed receiving new documents indicating that "high level officials at the White House and State Department worked with a network of conservative activists to conduct a "cleaning" of employees..." including Ms. Nowrouzadeh.

Nowrouzadeh is a distinguished Iranian American whose invaluable contributions to American national security led to her promotion to prominent positions in the White House, State Department, and Department of Defense. She served in both the George W. Bush and Obama administrations, thus demonstrating her proven track-record of adapting her work to the priorities of the sitting president, rather than any political party or preference. Given her prior experience and knowledge of Persian, she could have been an invaluable asset to the Trump administration.

Yet, recent evidence indicates Trump administration officials sought her ouster based on discriminatory intent. Recent documents reveal that when Nowrouzadeh asked her supervisor Brian Hook for help when confronted with personal attacks from political groups seeking her ouster, officials at the State Department and White House did not defend her but instead used character smears to force her out of her position on the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department.

Julia Haller, White House Liaison, wrote that Nowrouzadeh "was born in Iran," which is false and, even if accurate, should have no bearing on this matter. Haller's suggestion that Nowrouzadeh's Iranian heritage should be a factor in assessing whether Nowrouzadeh could loyally serve in the U.S. government betrays discriminatory intent that appears to be in clear violation of federal protections.

Finally, internal emails reveal that, despite terminating Ms. Nowrouzadeh's position on the Policy Planning Staff three months early for the foregoing improper reasons, State Department officials then tried to offer a misleading characterization of her actions: that she had been "return[ed] to a parent office of a civil servant at the completion of a detail assignment" – an objectively false statement. Such an ex post facto "cleaning" of the objective facts further raises red flags and evidences discriminatory intent, which is not only improper but also unlawful under federal law.

As organizations dedicated to ensuring that Iranian Americans contribute their extraordinary talents to civic life in the United States, failure to ensure accountability on Nowrouzadeh's unjust ouster risks deterring a generation of Iranian Americans eager to contribute to government service, national security, and civic life in the United States.

We urge the White House and State Department to fully comply with the requests from the ranking members of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, Elijah Cummings, and House Foreign Affairs Committee, Eliot Engel, in their letter on this subject dated March 15, 2018. We also urge the administration to empower an independent investigation into the ouster of Nowrouzadeh and other civil servants that holds those involved appropriately accountable.

Our groups would be willing to meet with you regarding these concerns in the hopes of charting out an acceptable path forward.

Sincerely,

Center for Human Rights in Iran
Iranian Alliances Across Borders
Iranian American Bar Association
National Iranian American Council
Pars Equality Center
Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans
United For Iran

Please direct response to:
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