



PAAIA

**THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS
ALLIANCE OF
IRANIAN AMERICANS**

Policy

Recommendations

for the 118th Congress

www.paaia.org

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Overview

Today, there are more than an estimated 1.5 million Iranian Americans nationwide. Iranian Americans are well-integrated into the fabric of American society, have a deep footprint in American industries and make contributions to all sectors of American public life including private industry, education, the military, law enforcement and government. At the same time, Iranian Americans remain deeply connected to family in Iran and strongly support the Iranian people's ambitions for human rights and democracy.

The Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that serves the interests of Iranian Americans and represents the community before U.S. policymakers and the American public. In recent years, PAAIA has committed itself to encouraging greater civic engagement within the next generation of Iranian Americans through our [Civic Leadership Program](#).

Similarly, PAAIA works to increase broader awareness of the Iranian American community through education and policy, and has successfully spearheaded bipartisan measures in the U.S. Congress in support of [the Iranian people](#) and for [common interests](#) shared by all Americans.

As the country prepares to welcome a new Congress, PAAIA wishes to share insight into the policy recommendations of the Iranian American community. These recommendations are based in part on results from PAAIA's [public opinion surveys](#) which are designed to gauge the community's views on various issues. Recommendations within the Iranian American community include:

1. Supporting the democratic aspirations and human rights of the Iranian people by advancing internet freedom, facilitating financial remittances, and other measures that offer valuable aid for the Iranian people.
2. Advancing common-sense legal immigration reform and ending discriminatory travel policies.
3. Recognizing Iranian heritage and its contributions to the United States and the world.

The following pages detail these priorities and provide context as to their impact on the Iranian American community.

Recommendations on U.S. Policy Towards Iran

U.S. policy towards Iran should be recalibrated to better serve the demands of the Iranian people for freedom and democracy. Since September of 2022, Iran has been consumed by protests that have spread throughout the country with all segments of society taking part and demanding their fundamental human rights and in support of the **Woman, Life, Freedom movement**. The Iranian government has responded with extreme violence, killing hundreds, including children, committing a horrific wave of executions, and arresting thousands while shutting down the internet to try and suppress their right to freedom of speech and assembly.

Pass House & Senate Resolution in Support of the Iranian People

The bipartisan and bicameral [Concurrent Iran Resolution](#) was introduced in the 117th Congress by Representatives Claudia Tenney (R-NY), Tom Malinowski (D-NJ), and Michael McCaul (R-TX) in the House (H.Con.Res.110), and Senators Bob Menendez (D-NJ) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) in the Senate (S.Con.Res.47).

The resolution commends the bravery, courage, and resolve of the women and men of Iran, and condemns the death of Mahsa Amini and the violent suppression by the Iranian authorities against peaceful demonstrators. It reaffirms U.S. support for internet freedom programs and encourages the Biden Administration to continue efforts to expand unrestricted internet access in Iran. Now in the 118th Congress, we support the reintroduced resolution and urge congressional leaders to bring the legislation to the floor for passage.

Support Internet Freedom in Iran

The Iranian people and civil society use the internet to communicate, organize, and expose the Iranian regime's human rights abuses. In response, the Iranian government seeks to curtail the free flow of information through internet shutdowns and censorship. Members of Congress and the Biden Administration should continue efforts to encourage tech companies under [General License D-2](#) to make vital products available to the people of Iran. In addition, Congress needs to strengthen the U.S. government's ability to combat authoritarian and repressive governments that are using Internet shutdowns as a means of suppressing information sharing and communication.

This could include funding for private companies like Starlink to offer their products free of charge in Iran as well as through legislation like the [American Freedom & Internet Act](#), which would authorize the U.S. government to develop methods to deploy and deliver wireless internet technologies around the world from the stratosphere or higher when the internet is shut down by governments or natural disasters.

Recommendations on U.S. Policy Towards Iran

Advocate for the Release of Iranian Americans Unjustly Detained in Iran & for the Prisoners of Conscience in Iran

Members of Congress should urge the Biden administration to prioritize the release of Iranian Americans unjustly detained in Iran. In addition, members of Congress should work with human rights organizations to speak out in support of other prisoners of conscience in Iran, including peaceful protesters and human rights defenders. Formal statements can be made through the [Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Defending Freedoms Project](#).

Enhance Human Rights Sanctions

Members of Congress should encourage the Biden Administration to use authorities such as the Global Magnitsky Act, or a broadly bipartisan MAHSA Act, to impose additional human rights sanctions on Iranian officials and entities responsible for the repression of the current protest. Members should also work with the State Department to call on the international community to impose human rights sanctions on officials and entities that are responsible for violating the human rights of the Iranian people. PAAIA will work in conjunction with Members of Congress to review and advance possible bipartisan legislative opportunities.

Facilitate Family Remittances to Iran from Iranian Americans

Members of Congress should urge the Biden Administration to better enable the transfer of remittances from Iranian Americans to family in Iran. Such remittances can provide valuable support for ordinary Iranians during difficult times, and Iranian Americans have encountered difficulties when attempting to transfer funds to family members. The U.S. Treasury should ensure that such transfers will be done in a safe and transparent manner, while also keeping the necessary sanctions in place to ensure that Iranian regime officials are not able to exploit such a carveout with 3rd party transfers.

Offer Protection to Iranians Fleeing Persecution

The U.S. should expand assistance for Iranians fleeing persecution in Iran. Members of Congress should encourage the State Department to expedite asylum cases and grant other visas. Given that the current protests and ensuing state violence are targeting students and university campuses, the U.S. should expedite and adjudicate more F-1 visa applications for Iranian students whose lives are in danger and could benefit from continuing their education in America.

Immigration

For far too long, Congress has failed to enact necessary improvements to our legal immigration system and address discriminatory visa policies. A number of measures that enjoy bipartisan support would address some of these long-standing issues, including family reunification, enhancing our healthcare workforce, and ensuring discriminatory travel bans are never incorporated again.

These measures represent an opportunity for members of Congress to reassert congressional authority over our immigration system and make meaningful changes that benefit the nation - all Americans alike.

Enact the Temporary Family Visitation (TFVA) Act

[The Temporary Family Visitation Act \(TFVA\)](#) would establish a new non-immigrant visa category for relatives of U.S. citizens and permanent residents to visit the United States. The bipartisan and bicameral legislation was introduced in the 117th Congress by Representatives Scott Peters (D-CA), Stephanie Bice (R-OK), Jim Himes (D-CT), and Maria Salazar (R-FL) in the House (H.R.3215), and Senators Rand Paul (R-KY) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) in the Senate (S.1635).

Currently, there is no visa specifically designed to temporarily reunite U.S. citizens and permanent residents with their relatives. Family members are obliged to apply to visit their relatives in the U.S. through B-2 visas. However, B-2 visitor visas lack consideration for family reunions, which results in an unnecessarily high denial rate because it is presumed that applicants with family members in the U.S. intend to immigrate.

TFVA would establish a new B-3 nonimmigrant visa category allowing U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents to petition for their family members to visit them temporarily. The requirements ensure that the applicants make specific and realistic plans for the course of their visit and provide financial assurances to the U.S. government, in addition to dissuading visa overstays by engaging the petitioner in the process of the application and prohibiting change of status for the applicant while in the U.S.

Immigration

Support Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act

The bipartisan and bicameral legislation reauthorizes and strengthens the existing [Conrad 30 federal visa waiver program](#) for foreign doctors, including Iranian students, who have studied medicine in the United States. The legislation was introduced in the 117th Congress by Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Susan Collins (R-ME), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), and Joni Ernst in the Senate (S.1810), and by Rep. Brad Schneider in the House (H.R.3541).

Under current immigration law, the J-1 visa requires foreign medical students to return to their home country for two years before returning to the United States. Conrad 30 waives this requirement in exchange for at least three years of medical service in an underserved area. The Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Act reauthorizes the program and makes it even stronger, allowing more medical students to take advantage of it, including Iranian doctors, at a time when there is a critical need for more doctors as we continue to combat COVID-19.

Pass the NO BAN Act

While the Executive Order to end the Travel Ban against Iran and other countries was a great relief for the Iranian American community, more is needed to ensure such a discriminatory policy is never enacted again, especially without congressional oversight.

The NO BAN Act is a meaningful and practical step forward for Iranian Americans and other communities that have been negatively impacted by the Travel Ban. By incorporating substantive criteria and accountability, the NO BAN Act safeguards against the abuse of presidential powers and ensures that the exclusion of entry is maintained for those who pose a real threat to the United States. The legislation passed the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 218-208 in the 117th Congress. We encourage congressional leaders to update the legislation in the 118th Congress to ensure it can gain stronger bipartisan support.

Recognize the Rich Heritage of Iran

Policymakers would be wise to think more creatively about crafting policies that would support and engage the United States' greatest asset in Iran – the Iranian people. Many experts have remarked that Iran is unique in the Middle East, in that the Iranian people maintain a favorable disposition towards America and its values. According to data from the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, the Iranian people hold more liberal and democratic values than any other society in the Middle East. Iran has a rich and diverse history. Lawmakers can enhance U.S. public diplomacy efforts by acknowledging and paying respect for revered ancient Iranian tradition and culture.

Pass the Nowruz Resolution

In the past, Reps. Mike Honda (D-CA) and later Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) have introduced bipartisan legislation that recognizes the cultural and historical significance of the Persian New Year, Nowruz. Nowruz, meaning “New Day,” celebrates the arrival of spring and dates back more than 3,500 years. The resolution wishes Iranian Americans, the people of Iran, and all those who celebrate the holiday a prosperous New Year. The resolution also underscores the importance of human rights and religious tolerance as embodied in the spirit of Nowruz and supports the rights of all Iranians to exercise freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, and freedom of speech.

By embracing the spirit of Nowruz, the legislation serves as more than just a reminder to lawmakers about the positive aspects of Iranian society, but it also sends a powerful gesture of goodwill to the Iranian people.