



Farhana Khera's Oral Statement as Prepared

Joint Congressional Hearing: Oversight of the Trump Administration's Muslim Ban – September 24, 2019

Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship and Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Joint Hearing

Good afternoon. My name is Farhana Khera. I'm the executive director of Muslim Advocates, a national civil rights organization. Since early 2017, we've been fighting the Muslim Ban in the courts — and working with Congress to right this wrong.

Chairs Lofgren & Bera and members of the committee, thank you for holding this historic hearing – the first congressional hearing on the Muslim Ban. Your presence here today signals your commitment to protecting civil rights for all. *[Pause]*

Ismail and Abdollah, thank you for your courage. You speak for thousands of Americans who are hurting today because of the cruelty of the Muslim Ban.

So, how did we get here and what can Congress do?

In January 2017—just seven days after his inauguration—President Trump issued an executive order banning people from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the U.S.

Thousands of Americans flocked to airports across the country in protest. As court after court ruled that this “Muslim ban” was unlawful, the President issued two revised versions of the ban, versions that claimed to include exceptions and a waiver process.

Immediately after the third ban went into effect, thousands of blanket denials for visas were issued to individuals before they even had a chance to apply for a waiver or demonstrate that they are eligible for one.

According to recent data from the State Department, of roughly 60,000 visa applications received during a 16-month period, only 5.1% of the waiver requests were granted. There is no waiver application process.

As we feared, the waiver process has been a sham.

We believe that the vast majority of the waivers sought are requests by Americans seeking to be reunited with their family or individuals seeking urgent medical treatment.

They are people like Maral Tabrizi, a green card holder married to a U.S. citizen who recently gave birth and desperately wants her parents to visit from Iran so they can hold their grandchild.

Or Afkab Hussein, a Somali refugee and green card holder, who arrived in 2015 with the promise that his wife and newborn son would soon join him. Even though they were approved for resettlement nearly three years ago, they have not yet been allowed to join Afkab here in America.

Or people like Hossein Barati desperately waiting for a visitor's visa so he can undergo specialized treatment for Stage 3 cancer, a lifesaving procedure unavailable in Iran.

The Muslim Ban demonizes and dehumanizes Muslims, evoking dark chapters from our nation's history. The story of immigrant Jews, Irish, Italians. The stain of Japanese American internment camps. Each of these groups was shunned and isolated for their "otherness." But America prevailed when these groups stopped being seen as outsiders, and started being seen as neighbors.

And that's who American Muslims are. Your neighbors.

We are your dentists and patients, your teachers and students. We're baristas and barbers, politicians and stand-up comedians. But most importantly, we are husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters.

This is why the Muslim Ban hurts us on a deeply personal level. Because we know it is contrary to the welcoming country we aspire to be.

But here's the good news: the President and Supreme Court do not have final say. Congress does.

Earlier this year, Congresswoman Judy Chu and Senator Chris Coons introduced the NO BAN Act, a bill that would immediately terminate the current Muslim Ban and amend the law to ensure no president enacts a similar discriminatory ban in the future again.

Most importantly, it would bring immediate relief to thousands of Americans who are separated from their loved ones today.

We urge Congress to pass the NO BAN Act and remove religious bigotry from our nation's immigration system for good.

And in the meantime, we urge the administration to make good on its promise to issue family-based and humanitarian waivers immediately and without further delay.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.