



Moral Compass Federation Oral Testimony

Delivered by Amy Marden, Senior Advisor for Strategy and Operations

Chairman Mast, Ranking Member Crow, and committee members. My name is Amy Marden and I represent the twenty member organizations of Moral Compass Federation that are not speaking before you today. I also represent a generation of Americans on the brink of adulthood when 9/11 occurred. Like many of the representatives in the room, I did not serve in our Military. I sit with you as an American citizen who witnessed my ex-husband, my friends, my neighbors and my fellow citizens face the realities of the twenty-year GWOT, both home and abroad. I am urgently pleading with my government to honor the commitment we made to protect our Afghan allies who fought shoulder to shoulder with us. The actions you take regarding these partners have ripple effects across my generation and the ones to follow.

Today, my colleagues shared harrowing accounts of the Taliban's brutal reprisals against Afghans who bravely supported the war. These stories, just a glimpse of the thousands of documented horrors, detail threats, kidnappings, torture, and murders targeting Afghan forces, interpreters, justice sector officials, and contractors.

Moral Compass Federation was formed to stand with our Afghan allies, offering support from their perilous journey to eventual resettlement in the US. In every waking moment, our phones are inundated with desperate messages from those in limbo, wondering if their visa packets will be approved, how they'll survive the wait for CARE flights, or protect their families from discovery and execution. Some, like the very special forces

that fought and trained with our own, ask why they have no visa pathway at all. The haunting silence that follows often precedes grim images of once-valiant comrades, battered, mutilated, or executed. We are tired. But, we uphold a promise made as Americans: those who risked everything for us will be protected.

Imagine a room in the not-so-distant future, in a far-off corner of the globe. A soldier is seated at a table, sharing tea with a potential ally, asking for his trust. This potential ally thinks about the tragic sights of individuals plunging to their fate in Kabul, remembers how he watched in horror as mothers desperately attempted to save their children by throwing them over barbed wire walls, and recalls stories of Afghans left to die at the hands of the enemy. This is not just about Afghanistan.

The conversation in this room, and the decisions you make, have a direct impact on our National Foreign Policy interests.

Our actions are being scrutinized by both allies and adversaries. How we treat our partners matters. How we conduct our affairs matters. We bear a moral duty to those who have dedicated themselves to protecting us. This duty is not merely strategic; it is a profoundly significant reflection of our commitment to American ideals. Neglecting this duty risks perilous consequences. Let's not repeat the mistakes of the past.

The conversation in this room and the decisions you make have a direct impact on our military and our readiness as a nation.

Suicide is now the second leading cause of death in veterans under age 45. Our armed services are failing to meet recruitment goals necessary to maintain a healthy fighting force. And, Americans' confidence in the military is at its lowest point in 35 years.

Recognizing and addressing the moral toll of the Afghanistan withdrawal is crucial not only for the well-being of our armed forces but also for the overall strength and resilience of our nation. Helping Afghans helps veterans.

You invited us today to learn; I implore you to leave today and act. Our requests are urgent and clear: ensure viable visa pathways for our most trusted and vetted Afghan allies, and forge a public-private partnership with the veteran organizations represented today. Lean *in* to our community. Lean *in* to our knowledge and experience, and let us be your trusted partners. The relocation of our Afghan allies is a complex issue, crossing agencies, branches of government, and political parties. Your actions can help end this crisis, begin to heal our veterans' moral injury, and show the world that America's values endure.

The room I asked you to imagine in the not-so-distant future holds two people who will be allies, or who will be adversaries. Ask yourself. How will the conversations in this room today affect that room across the globe? Will we create an enemy or a partner?

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.