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DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND
POLICY COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States House of Representatives

October 31, 2023

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Mr. Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. Blinken and Mr. Sullivan:

I write regarding the approximately 600 Americans who remain trapped in Gaza.¹ It is abhorrent that Hamas has been preventing their safe departure. Every day the Rafah Border Crossing remains closed for those seeking refuge is another day they remain in harm's way. I have heard directly from constituents who have family members and loved ones that wish to leave Gaza but are unable to do so because of Hamas. On behalf of my constituents, I implore you to use every possible means to get this border crossing open for American citizens.

I appreciate the Biden administration's work with those in the region to secure release of the hostages, push for safe passage of American citizens and foreign nationals to exit Gaza, to allow the unobstructed flow of humanitarian assistance, and to protect civilian lives during this conflict. These are goals that can be achieved by humanitarian pauses.² It is encouraging that Egypt is prepared to allow American citizens and foreign nationals to come through the Rafah Border Crossing into Egypt and that Israel has no issue. However, Hamas continues to show their disregard for human life and lack of interest in the welfare of the Palestinian people.

I know the administration prioritizes the safety and security of U.S. citizens overseas. To that end, U.S. citizens in the affected areas need something more than to be told to monitor local news and follow the emergency instructions provided by local authorities. My constituents need to be able to return home safely.

¹ <https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/sotu/date/2023-10-29/segment/01>

² <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-the-un-security-council-ministerial-meeting-on-the-situation-in-the-middle-east/>

Like millions of Americans and others around the world, I watched the events of October 7 and since with horror. The scale of violence against innocent Israelis and Palestinians has been devastating and intolerable. You are rightly encouraging that all possible precautions are being taken to protect innocent civilians because we must help civilians get out of harm's way. It must be a top priority to secure the release of every hostage Hamas holds and those being forced to wait at the border, especially American citizens. Hamas is essentially holding these Palestinian-Americans hostage as well.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to my urgent request. I will continue to support my constituents who are simply seeking the return home of their loved ones. At the same time, America must continue to uphold our values, respect human rights and international law, and provide life-saving assistance whenever possible. As we pray together for a lasting peace to this dreadful conflict, I remain ready to work together to help my constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Pascrell Jr". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent "J" at the end.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress