

November 14, 2023

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, Members of the Committee, thank you for providing me this opportunity to be with you today to share my family's story.

My name is Anna Corbett. I am the wife of Ryan Corbett. We have been blessed with three children, Ketsia, Miriam, and Caleb. Our children have brought incredible joy to our lives.

I am here today because our family is in crisis. My husband, Ryan, has been wrongfully detained by the Taliban in deplorable and inhumane conditions for 461 days. His crime? Being a U.S. Citizen in Afghanistan.

I'll share more about Ryan's conditions and his treatment in a short while. First, allow me to share about our lives and what led us to Afghanistan, now more than a decade ago.

We are American citizens, but we are also citizens of the world. We believe that every human life is sacred, whether someone was born in a country devastated by decades of war, or here in our Nation's capital. We are also people of faith. Our faith has inspired us to a life of service to others.

And so, in 2010, our family moved from Minneapolis to Kabul to work with NGOs in support of humanitarian projects. During this time, we came to believe that the lives of local families could be dramatically improved by empowering them to start and run their own businesses.

To that end, in 2017, Ryan started a business-consulting and microfinance company called Bloom Afghanistan. Bloom's mission was to equip the Afghan people with the tools, education, and capital needed to build and maintain successful small businesses. Ryan took the time to learn the local language, Pashto, and connected deeply with his clients and their families. As a result, dozens of Afghans were able to start their own businesses with micro-loans and Ryan's coaching.

I understand it may sound unconventional, but we loved our community, we loved our lives of service, and we saw much opportunity to better the lives of the Afghan people.

Then, as is well known, in mid-2021, the Taliban's re-emergence changed everything - for Afghanistan and for my family. Our family evacuated on August 17. This was a difficult time, having to leave behind our home, our community and our lives there. Yet despite our own personal anguish, we felt deeply that we could and should continue to support those we left behind, including Ryan's employees.

That is why, in January of 2022, Ryan returned to Afghanistan to make sure he could keep the business going and to pay his local employees. He returned to New York without incident, feeling encouraged that his business was welcome in the country by the authorities who renewed his visa.

Unfortunately, in hindsight, this trip created a false sense of security. During Ryan's subsequent business trip to Afghanistan in August of last year, he, a European colleague, and two local

partners were detained by the Taliban. These colleagues were each released by the end of 2022, but Ryan continues to be held without charge.

As you can imagine, every day of these past 15 months has been a living nightmare for our family. Until now, I've suffered outside the public eye while awaiting progress that hasn't come. Yet I cannot remain quiet when I fear so deeply for Ryan's welfare and, with winter setting in, his very life.

Since Ryan was taken 15 months ago, he received one visit from our protecting power, in January 2023, and I had a single six-minute phone call with him in May.

What little we do know about Ryan has come from other western citizens who have been released. Ryan is being held in a 3 by 3-meter basement cell with other western detainees. He eats little, other than scraps of greasy goat and fat. He is held in solitary confinement for weeks at a time. Ryan must seek permission to access the bathroom, and this, too, is limited. He is taken outside for sunlight only once a month for mere minutes.

We recently learned that Ryan has been fainting and experiencing seizures. He is often threatened with physical harm. He is told by his captors that he is forgotten and that his country doesn't care about him. And why wouldn't he believe it, when other westerners have come and gone so much faster than he? The impact on his mental health is unspeakable.

Meanwhile, our family has done our best to adjust to life in the U.S. Our children transitioned from homeschooling to public school. Our children played soccer and basketball for the first time, and my oldest daughter was voted into Homecoming Court and learned to drive.

Milestone birthdays have come and gone - including a sweet 16 and Ryan's fortieth - all while mourning not just the absence but the uncertainty of Ryan's condition and what he will be like when we finally see him again.

We are grateful for the efforts that the Special Envoy for Hostage Affairs, Ambassador Roger Carstens and his office have made to bring Ryan home and for their near daily support. We are also appreciative of the bi-partisan support in Congress to help recover Ryan, in particular from you, Chairman McCaul; our local Representative Congresswoman Tenney; and Leader Schumer and Senator Gillibrand. You have truly been our champions.

We are in communication with the White House and are thankful for the National Security Council's direct engagement and look forward to meeting with them this afternoon.

Despite these efforts, we have been unable to even secure regular health and safety visits for Ryan, much less to progress efforts to secure his release.

Ryan's detention is a tragedy for our family. It is also a tragedy for the U.S. - that someone could be held simply for being an American. I know there are engagements to bring Ryan and other Americans like him home - but, for us, the process has gone on for 15 months, with no clear path, only one phone call, and one brief welfare visit.

I am thankful to live in a country where both sides of the aisle are united on prioritizing the health, safety and return of Americans wrongfully detained abroad. I am confident that bipartisan support in Congress will expediate bringing Ryan, an American citizen, home. We can all agree how important it is to bring my husband and my children's father back home to New York.

I'm speaking now to the Taliban. Please end this. Please end hostage diplomacy. I don't know what it will take, but I need Ryan back. Our children need him. We need reassurance that Ryan will live long enough for this all to be resolved.

My husband was trying to do a good thing for the people of Afghanistan. Now he is suffering and so are we. We know that the U.S. and Afghanistan cannot move forward while American citizens are being wrongfully detained for political ends. I promise you that my family will not stop advocating for Ryan until he is released.

Thank you, committee members, for allowing me to share our story and for helping us bring Ryan home.