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VETERANS AFFAIRS & EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS

January 6, 2022

Mr. Thomas Cherniskey, President  
Cambria County Board of Commissioners  
200 S. Center Street  
Ebensburg, PA 15931

**RE: Concerns with Resettling Afghan Refugees in Cambria County**

Dear Commissioner Chernisky:

I am writing to express deep concerns with a proposal by Vision Together 2025 to resettle Afghan refugees in and around Johnstown. As you know, leaders of the group posed the idea of bringing displaced Afghan immigrants to live and work in Cambria County as a way of reducing population decline and filling skilled jobs.

This move could have enormous repercussions on our schools, businesses, hospitals, law enforcement and taxpayers. Vision Together 2025 is a nonprofit corporation – not a governing body – and therefore has no authority to develop and enact public policy. The Board of Commissioners, in conjunction with Johnstown City Council, must take the reins of this issue and hold a series of public hearings to fully vet the idea.

Local taxpayers, school boards and public officials must all have their voices heard. Do our schools have the resources to accept and properly educate students who speak Persian or Pashto languages? Can our local health system handle an influx of people when it struggles to meet current demand? Does our law enforcement community have the resources to ensure a safe integration of Afghans and effectively communicate with them?

While it's true that our area has seen population decline in recent years, I strongly believe the best way to grow Cambria County is through job creation, job training, fair wages, safe streets, and good schools. I and other local officials have worked hard to bring funding for our Career and Technical Centers and other job-training facilities to provide the hands-on education needed to meet the need of today's skilled jobs. We should continue to support and train our local workforce before considering resettling a new population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank Burns".

Frank Burns  
State Representative, 72<sup>nd</sup> District

Cc: Commissioners B.J. Smith and Scott Hunt  
Mayor Frank Janakovic and Deputy Mayor Marie Mock  
Council Members Ricky Britt, Sylvia King, Michael Capriotti, Dave Vitovich and Charles Amone