



November 24, 2015

Re: US Resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees

Dear Senator:

We write to urge you to oppose proposals, including those similar to H.R. 4038, that would undermine the effectiveness of the U.S. refugee resettlement system. We need you to stand with us at this crucial moment to honor America’s commitment to protecting vulnerable refugees from Syria, Iraq and other countries.

Many of our organizations have long worked to assist individuals who have been persecuted because of their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity by assisting them in securing resettlement in the United States. In the wake of the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris, we understand why some have asked whether our refugee admissions processes are strong and secure. But from our extensive work to assist refugees seeking safe haven through the U.S. asylum and resettlement processes, we know that these systems are rigorous and secure. If anything, we have criticized the resettlement vetting process as cumbersome, inefficient and plagued with delays, while recognizing the professional dedication of U.S. security officials who lead the process.

We are very concerned about new “certification” or other proposals that would halt, or delay even further, the ability of the U.S. resettlement program to bring refugees to the United States. It is important to consider the facts. The U.S. resettlement system includes the most rigorous vetting applied to any population coming to this country, as Department of Homeland Security officials have detailed. In a November 19, 2015 letter, former Homeland Security Secretaries Michael Chertoff and Janet Napolitano, who served Republican and Democratic administrations respectively, confirmed that the U.S. vetting process currently in place for refugee resettlement is “thorough and robust” and “will allow us to safely admit the most vulnerable refugees while protecting the American people.”

Through our work, we know of many Syrian, Iraqi and other refugees who have been targeted for persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Those who are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) have been targeted with horrific violence and sentenced to public executions that are later broadcast on social media. Those who flee face additional discrimination and abuse within refugee communities. These vulnerable refugees deserve our protection, and we know they can be resettled safely using current security screening and vetting processes. Denying them protection, or limiting protection to those who are Christian only, would be devastating to those who most need our compassion, and it would provide a public relations victory of sorts to ISIS and others who seek to justify their terrorism using cultural and religious propaganda.

Make no mistake about it, the “American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act of 2015,” H.R. 4038, would bring the refugee resettlement system, which already moves at a very slow pace, to a grinding halt. While cases of individual Syrian and Iraqi refugees await “certification,” medical and other processing clearances would expire, triggering massive disarray and confusion. This would leave LGBT and other refugees from these countries stranded – in often highly dangerous situations in the Middle East – as they continue to wait for the program to move forward.

Protecting the persecuted, and resettling vulnerable refugees, are U.S. commitments that have long enjoyed strong bipartisan support because they reflect this nation’s highest ideals. We urge you to stand up for these American ideals of equality and ensure that America’s bipartisan commitment to protecting the persecuted is not abandoned in the wake of European security concerns.

We thank you for your attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,



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