

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 22, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

Earlier this month, we witnessed the deadliest terrorist attack on the U.S. Homeland since 9/11. It is clear that Islamist terrorists are still targeting our country and our way of life, and the American people expect Washington to respond decisively. Now more than ever we must focus on shutting down all potential terrorist pathways into the United States—regardless of whether extremists try to infiltrate from online or across our borders. This includes preventing our humanitarian programs from being exploited by jihadists, yet we are concerned that the Administration has not taken the grave concerns of state and local governments seriously.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has threatened to use the global migrant crisis as a Trojan Horse, and now they are doing exactly that. ISIS fighters are exploiting the refugee process to infiltrate the West to conduct terrorist attacks. For instance, some of the suspects behind the heinous attacks in Paris and Brussels posed as refugees to sneak into Europe, and dozens of other suspected jihadists reportedly have entered the continent the same way. This month, Germany disrupted another ISIS plot and found that at least some of the operatives had arrived under the guise of refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war.

We cannot be blind to this threat. But we are alarmed to learn that even in the face of these terror plots, your Administration is still attempting to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States this fiscal year. In fact, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson recently announced that 4,700 Syrian refugees have been approved for resettlement, while an additional 7,900 are awaiting security review. America has a proud tradition of welcoming refugees into our country, but our nation's compassion cannot come before our national security.

U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies are still worried they cannot confidently root out terrorists from these groups. Indeed, leaders from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Counterterrorism Center have testified before the House Homeland Security Committee that intelligence gaps are preventing them from fully vetting such individuals—and that extremists could potentially slip through the cracks. We are not reassured that these security weaknesses have been fully remedied, and we believe the surge of admissions of Syrian refugees poses a high security risk to our country.

These concerns are not hypothetical. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has informed the House Homeland Security Committee in writing that individuals with terrorist ties in Syria have already attempted to gain access to the United States through our refugee program. And in January two Iraqi refugees were arrested in the United States on terror-related charges, one of which had ties to ISIS.

The threat could not be clearer: terrorists are targeting our homeland, and they know that security vulnerabilities in the refugee process could allow them to reach the West undetected.

Despite this, we believe your Administration has manifestly failed to reassure and adequately engage State and local governments on these resettlements. For instance, the State of Texas, which we proudly represent, accepts more refugees than any other State, yet the Administration has been vague and unresponsive to our demands for greater transparency on the issue of Syrian refugees. But under the Refugee Act of 1980, the federal government is required to “consult regularly” with State and local governments about refugees, including “the intended distribution of refugees...*before their placement in those States and localities.*” 8 U.S.C. § 1522(a)(2)(A) (emphasis added). Your Administration is not living up to this standard.

The lack of transparency is dangerous for everyone. Texas is not only responsible for protecting its own citizens from public safety threats like terrorism but also for protecting refugees themselves who may be targeted with violence. If our State is kept in the dark about Syrian refugee resettlements, it puts innocent people at greater risk. And if we do not have a greater say in these matters, the public will lose faith in our government’s ability to live up to its fundamental obligation to protect the people it serves.

We insist that you work with the State of Texas to reform your Administration’s refugee resettlement policies and procedures. It would be a mistake to continue surging Syrian refugees into our communities without explaining how the Administration will live up to its obligations to engage State and local governments. The places these refugees are being relocated must be better prepared for their arrival, and States like Texas must have a say in that process. We implore you to act immediately to outline a plan for improving this process and addressing the serious concerns States like ours have expressed.

It would also be a mistake to proceed with this resettlement policy without providing greater public safety assurances. That is why we also urge you to proceed with implementing the national security safeguards outlined in H.R. 4038, American Security Against Foreign Enemies (SAFE) Act of 2015. These safeguards would require top law enforcement and intelligence officials to validate the background-check process for Syrian and Iraqi refugees and to certify to Congress that admitted individuals are not a threat. Such officials have expressed concerns about current security gaps, and they should have a greater say in the admissions process. We hope you will agree that we need to work together to keep potentially dangerous individuals from infiltrating these programs to reach our territory.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL T. MCCAUL
Member of Congress, TX-10



GREG ABBOTT
Governor
State of Texas



DAN PATRICK
Lieutenant Governor
State of Texas


KEVIN BRADY
Member of Congress, TX-08


MICHAEL CONAWAY
Member of Congress, TX-11


BILL FLORES
Member of Congress, TX-17


JEB HENSARLING
Member of Congress, TX-05


PETE SESSIONS
Member of Congress, TX-32

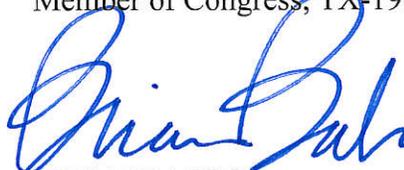

LAMAR SMITH
Member of Congress, TX-21

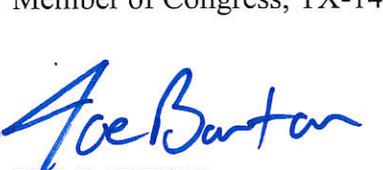

MAC THORNBERRY
Member of Congress, TX-13


KAY GRANGER
Member of Congress, TX-12


RANDY NEUGEBAUER
Member of Congress, TX-19


RANDY WEBER
Member of Congress, TX-14


BRIAN BABIN
Member of Congress, TX-36


JOE BARTON
Member of Congress, TX-06


MICHAEL BURGESS
Member of Congress, TX-26


JOHN CARTER
Member of Congress, TX-31


JOHN CULBERSON
Member of Congress, TX-07

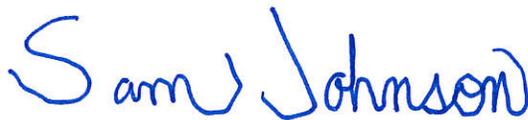

BLAKE FARENTHOLD
Member of Congress, TX-27



LOUIE GOHMERT
Member of Congress, TX-01



WILL HURD
Member of Congress, TX-23



SAM JOHNSON
Member of Congress, TX-03



KENNY MARCHANT
Member of Congress, TX-24



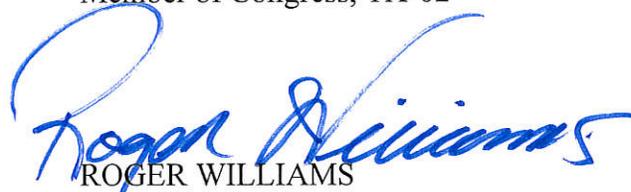
PETE OLSON
Member of Congress, TX-22



TED POE
Member of Congress, TX-02



JOHN RATCLIFFE
Member of Congress, TX-04



ROGER WILLIAMS
Member of Congress, TX-25

CC:

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable James Comey
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20535

The Honorable James Clapper Jr.
Director
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511

The Honorable Nicholas Rasmussen
Director
The National Counterterrorism Center
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, DC 20511