

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 9, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretaries Kerry and Johnson:

We write to express our concern regarding the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and our nation's response. We appreciate the Administration's plan to accept a larger number of Syrian refugees, as well as overall refugees, in the next fiscal year. Yet, increasing the number of refugees we welcome is insufficient as a response, if we do not have the expanded capacity to screen and effectively resettle refugees within our borders. We urge you to work with Congress through the budget and appropriations process to allocate sufficient resources to effectively increase and thoroughly screen applicants for resettlement in the United States. Likewise, the Administration can and should institute reforms to boost the number of refugees processed by taking the following actions which do not require additional resources.

First, we urge the Administration to expand the Priority 3 (P-3) program. As you know, the P-3 program allows refugees with relatives in the United States to have access to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. The program not only enables the relatives of Americans to be resettled more rapidly, it also frees up United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees resources to focus on other applicants. Unfortunately, the P-3 program is limited to applicants with a family member who was first granted legal status in the United States as a refugee or asylee. It makes no sense to deny a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident parent the opportunity to remove his or her child from harm's way simply because that parent came to the United States through a legal path other than a refugee or asylum application. In the past, the P-3 program has been open to all refugees with a relative legally residing in the United States. We urge you to broaden the P-3 program to allow access for all refugees with a relative legally residing in the United States, per its original structure. Likewise, we ask you to allow additional qualifying relatives to sponsor family members beyond the immediate nuclear family.

Second, we request that the Administration improve coordination to avoid the need to repeat security checks that expire while a refugee is still being processed. As you know, refugees go through multiple screenings before they can come to the United States, with each screening only valid for a limited time. As a result, an applicant could have one screening expire while he or she waits for another screening to be completed, in turn requiring a repeat of the first screening. Worse, an entire family may have their screenings expire while they wait for a single family member to complete another part of the screening process. When applicants are forced to complete screenings multiple times in this fashion, the result is unnecessary duplication and

delay. This constitutes a waste of resources that has the potential to leave refugees in harm's way for additional months. Processing agencies need to increase coordination to ensure that applicants are not forced to complete checks multiple times and should seriously consider expanding the validity period of such checks, when doing so does not compromise the integrity of the screening. Further, the processing agencies should use their authority to expedite particular screenings when necessary to avoid duplication and undue delay, while still subjecting refugees to the most rigorous security checks of any category of traveler to the United States.

Third, we ask the Administration to inform families if only a few members, but not all, have been cleared. When only part of a family has been approved for resettlement, those family members who have been approved should have the ability to reach safety within our borders. Ideally, the processing agencies should do everything in their power to expedite approvals so that entire families are not held up because of a delay in a single family member's application. If applications cannot be expedited, family members should still be told when they have been approved, as it allows applicants to decide whether they prefer to remain with their family members or to move along to safety in the United States. This information could enable applicants to avoid an imminent risk of injury or death, and there is no good reason to withhold it except in extraordinary circumstances.

Ultimately, it will take the inclusive effort of the international community to create a stable environment in Syria. In the interim, it is our moral duty to address this growing humanitarian disaster and allow families to be reunified. Syrians who are resettled would enjoy the support of active and engaged Syrian-American communities around the United States. These families would have a home ready for them and a source of financial support.

We stand ready to work with the Administration to join our allies around the world in providing assistance to millions of people who have been displaced from their homes and countries during the ongoing civil war in Syria. Thank you in advance for your consideration of these requests.

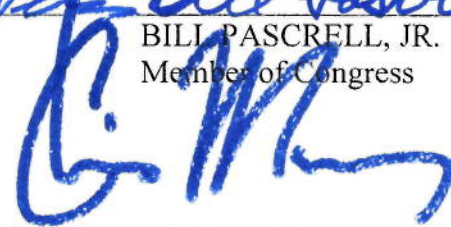
Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate


GARY PETERS
United States Senate


BILL PASCRELL, JR.
Member of Congress


JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senate


CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate

Barbara A. Mikulski

BARBARA A. MIKULSKI
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Andre Carson

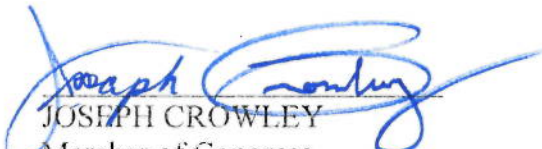
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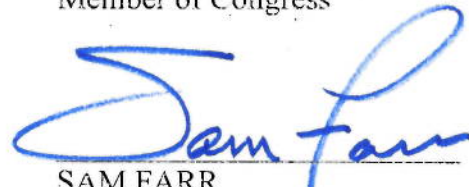

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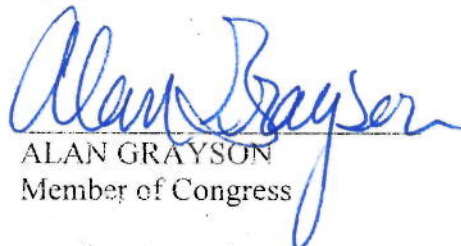

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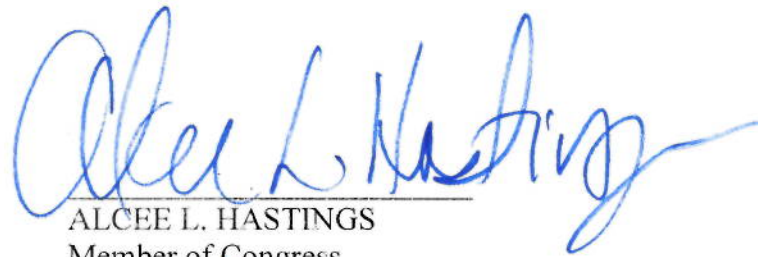

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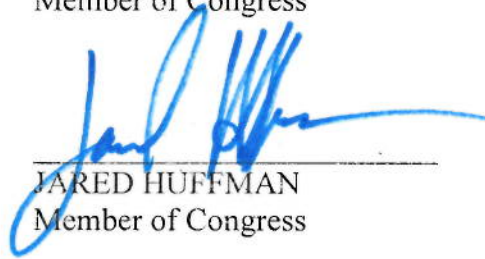
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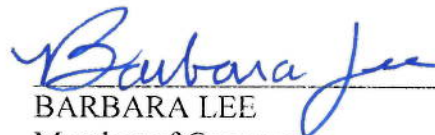
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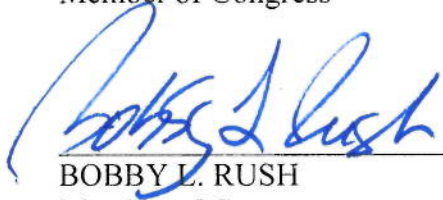
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Jared Polis

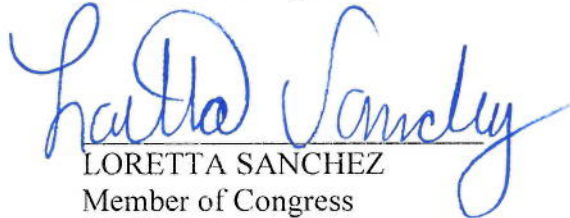
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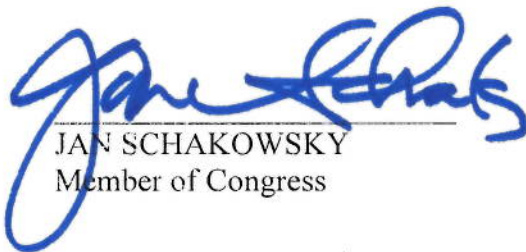
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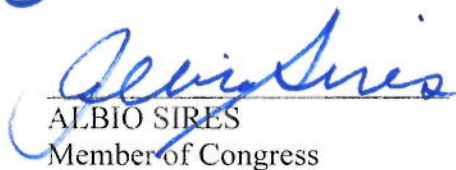
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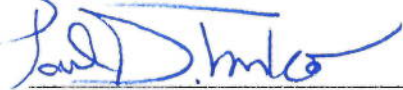
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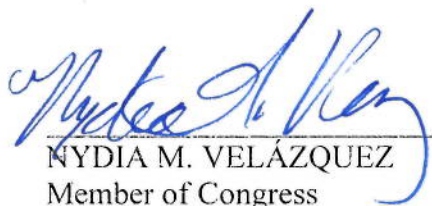
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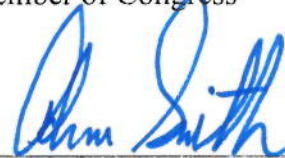
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