

Refugee Council USA

January 15, 2015

Dear Senator,

On behalf of Refugee Council USA (RCUSA), a coalition of 20 non-governmental organizations committed to refugee protection and welcome, I write to you today to urge you to protect Syrian and Iraqi refugees and the integrity of the United States refugee resettlement program by voting NO on H.R. 4038- The American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act 2015.

Since 1975, the United States has resettled more than 3 million refugees from around the world, including 169,000 from Bosnia and more than 100,000 from Iraq. Three quarters of a million of those refugees entered the U.S. since 2001. During that time, there have been no recorded terrorist acts in the United States by a refugee. That should come as little surprise. Refugees are, by definition, people fleeing from persecution—not persecutors themselves.

H.R. 4038 creates a bureaucratic review process that could take years to implement and would effectively shut down refugee resettlement. The bill requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to “certify” whether an individual refugee is a threat or not after “concurrence” with the Directors of the FBI and DNI. The bill does not provide guidance on what the process for certification will be. This process will have to be created and agreed upon by three heads of agencies. Establishing such a process could take years, and in the meantime, refugees who could be resettled would languish in camps and dangerous situations, Syrian Americans would not be able to reunite with their family members, and there would be very real ramifications for international refugee protection and U.S. foreign policy interests in the region.

The process, once established, would add months or years to the security screening process, which is already the lengthiest and most robust in the world, routinely taking between 18 and 36 months. Obtaining the concurrence of three heads of federal agencies for EACH REFUGEE would take years and effectively put an end to the refugee resettlement program. For reasons of security and safety, security and medical clearances are only valid for limited periods of time. During the certification process, these clearances will expire. This will mean that refugees will be caught in an un-ending loop of security clearances that will never end.

The bill requires reporting to THIRTEEN congressional committees on EACH REFUGEE that is considered for resettlement. This is unreasonably burdensome and will further delay the admission of refugees, cause security clearances to expire, and effectively end the program.

Refugees are already the most vetted non-citizens in our country. All refugees undergo thorough and rigorous security screenings prior to arriving in the United States, including but not limited to multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks of applicants' fingerprints and photographs; in-depth, in-person interviews by well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center; and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. Supervisory review of all decisions; random case assignment; inter-agency national security teams; trained document experts; forensic testing of documents; and interpreter

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Members:

Asylum Access
Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL)
Center for Victims of Torture
Church World Service/
Immigration & Refugee
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Episcopal Migration Ministries
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Development Council
HIAS
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and Refugee Service
ORAM – Organization for
Refuge, Asylum & Migration
RefugePoint
Southeast Asia Resource
Action Center
U.S. Conference of Catholic
Bishops/Migration & Refugee
Services
U.S. Committee for Refugees
and Immigrants
World Relief

monitoring are in place to maintain the security of the refugee resettlement program. Due to technological advances, Syrian refugees are also undergoing iris scans to confirm their identity through the process.

The bill is a waste of resources. Funds used to establish and run this certification process would be better used in conducting actual security reviews of refugees and others who are vetted by these agencies.

The bill is a pretext and requires differential treatment of refugees from Syria and Iraq without providing a justification for the additional verification. It is a disguised attempt to stop refugees from two countries long beset by internal conflict, including refugees who have been in neither Syria nor Iraq for four years. Differential treatment, with no clear justification, amounts to discrimination on the basis of nationality without rational basis.

No terrorist attacks in the US have been committed by refugees. The few non-citizens who have caused harm have come to the US as tourists or through other means. This bill will tell the world that the US has no interest in being part of the global solution to protect the victims of the violence in Syria and Iraq. It will keep US citizen family members of these refugees from reuniting with their loved ones who are in danger. This bill does nothing to keep the country safe, is a waste of tax dollars, and is an attack on refugees and immigrants - both those who are seeking safety and those who are already here.

For these reasons we ask that you vote NO on H.R. 4038. We also want to draw your attention to the attached letter signed by 199 national organizations and 295 local organizations in support of Syrian refugees and opposing HR 4038.

We appreciate your support in protecting the refugees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melanie Nezer".

Melanie Nezer
Chair, Refugee Council USA