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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

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October 17, 2014

President Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

As members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which has oversight over immigration and visa policies, we write to express our grave concerns about the seemingly inflexible position you have taken in issuing a travel ban or heightened entry requirements on individuals who may be infected with the Ebola virus.

On September 16 of this year, you spoke at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, saying,

“Now, here's the hard truth: In West Africa, Ebola is now an epidemic of the likes that we have not seen before. It's spiraling out of control. It is getting worse. It's spreading faster and exponentially. Today, thousands of people in West Africa are infected. That number could rapidly grow to tens of thousands. And if the outbreak is not stopped now, we could be looking at hundreds of thousands of people infected, with profound political and economic and security implications for all of us. So this is an epidemic that is not just a threat to regional security -- it's a potential threat to global security if these countries break down, if their economies break down, if people panic. That has profound effects on all of us, even if we are not directly contracting the disease.”

We couldn't agree more that an Ebola epidemic is a national security issue, and a threat to global security. And, we couldn't agree more with the American people that a travel ban must be put in place to protect our homeland and reduce any spread of the virus.

According to officials at the State Department, between March 1, 2014, and September 27, 2014, a total of 6,398 visas were issued to nationals of the following countries; 3,135 for Liberians, 1,472 for Sierra Leoneans, and 1,791 for Guineans. Meanwhile, according to International SOS, dozens of countries – including many in Africa – have instituted travel and entry restrictions.

We urge you to immediately cease issuing visas to persons of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, and to consider expanding this ban to other countries that may not have standards in place to properly screen travelers entering the United States. We also urge you to more strongly use tools at your disposal to receive flight manifests ahead of time to screen and turn away passengers if they have traveled to or are coming from countries with an Ebola outbreak.

At this point, you and your administration must consider all options to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus. Dismissing a travel ban or a moratorium on visa issuances sends a signal that you're not serious about containing the outbreak and preventing infections of individuals on U.S. soil. We implore you to immediately use your statutory authority under Section 212(f) of the Immigration and Nationality Act to suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or nonimmigrants who are detrimental to the interests of the United States.

Sincerely,















