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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

KOLAN L. DAVIS, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*  
KRISTINE J. LUCIUS, *Democratic Chief Counsel and Staff Director*

November 4, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Vice Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
503 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 205

Dear Colleagues:

I write to express concern about the state of security measures being taken to vet the tens of thousands Syrian refugees the Obama Administration plans on admitting to our country in fiscal year 2016, and respectfully request that any spending bill appropriating funds for refugee resettlement have firm limitations before the Administration is allowed to press forward with its plan.

On several occasions, senior U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials have made statements regarding their concern about the Administration's ability to adequately ascertain the criminal background of these individuals. One particularly alarming statement comes from Director of the FBI, James Comey. In a hearing before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs on October 8, Director Comey stated, "My concern there is there are certain gaps...in the data available to us." This data, which includes fingerprints, background, or biographic information, is crucial for an adequate screening of potential refugees entering the United States. Director Comey continued in that hearing saying, "There is risk associated with bringing anybody in from the outside, but especially from a conflict zone like that."

In a hearing before the House Committee on the Judiciary in October, Director Comey acknowledged that despite a large pool of data on Iraqi refugees, our past program for admitting refugees from Iraq inadvertently allowed into our country "a number of people who were of serious concern, including two that were charged when we found their fingerprints on improvised explosive devices from Iraq." Our ability to screen individuals from war-torn Syria is extremely limited by comparison. At that same hearing, Director Comey said, "The only thing we can query is information that we have. And so if we have no information on someone,

they've never crossed our radar screen, never been a ripple in the pond, there will be no record of them there. And so it will be challenging."

Director Comey is not the only senior national security official with these doubts. At the same Senate hearing on October 8, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Nicholas Rasmussen, said in specific reference to Syria: "The intelligence picture we have of this particular conflict zone is not as rich as we would like it to be..."

As the Islamic State continues their campaign of terror across the Middle East, they seek new avenues and opportunities to extend their hostile reach into the United States. It is no secret that they seek to do us harm by whatever means necessary. The Islamic State will undoubtedly seek to leverage the anonymity of blending in amongst the thousands of people fleeing from their violence. With such a determined enemy, it is imperative that the Executive Branch do everything reasonably within its power to mitigate the extraordinary risk posed by the President's plan to admit tens of thousands of individuals from the heart of ISIL's territory.

As the leaders of the Senate Appropriations Committee, you have the opportunity to ensure that taxpayer funds are used effectively to properly and securely screen refugees entering the United States. I urge that you, as part of the appropriations legislation before the committee, require, as a condition for any funding for refugee resettlement for Syrian refugees, a comprehensive plan on how security will be achieved. Furthermore, not one dollar should be expended until stringent parameters for vetting these refugees are established. Therefore, I urge you to include language in the spending measure to require a certification by intelligence and counterterrorism officials, such as the FBI or the NCTC, before any refugees from Syria are admitted. This added layer of oversight ensures that all officials are properly consulted and their expertise is taken into utmost consideration before the homeland is susceptible to any risk.

I appreciate your attention to this matter as you work to finalize the fiscal year 2016 spending measures.

*PR: I hope you will take my request in the last paragraph very seriously!*

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary