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One Hundred Fourteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2015

The Honorable Susan Rice
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Dr. Rice:

It is our understanding that the State Department plans to accelerate its efforts to admit Syrian refugees into the United States. In December, Assistant Secretary of State Anne Richard stated that she expected admissions from Syria "to surge in 2015 and beyond," and we have since received reports that the Department is planning to accept tens of thousands of Syrian refugees by the end of 2016.

The resettlement of such a high number of Syrian refugees raises serious national security concerns. The United States has a proud history of welcoming refugees from all over the world; however, the Syrian conflict is a special case. Syria is currently home to the largest convergence of Islamist terrorists in world history, surpassing even the Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s. The country has become a safe haven for tens of thousands of extremist fighters, including more than 20,000 foreign fighters who have flocked to the region. Many of these militant fanatics are committed to attacking the United States and its allies and have declared their intent to do so.

Screening these refugees is not a task to be taken lightly. As we saw with previous Iraqi refugees—some of whom were initially admitted to the United States and subsequently found to have ties to al Qaeda—the lack of a thorough security screening process can result in individuals with terrorist ties exploiting the refugee program to resettle in the U.S. Homeland. Such failures in the initial vetting process ultimately become a substantial burden to our law enforcement agencies, which are then responsible for ensuring admitted individuals do not pose a threat to our country.

We are concerned about the possibility of groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) exploiting the refugee resettlement process to mask the deployment of operatives into the West. Already we have seen signs that extremists may be working to take advantage of refugee routes into Europe and elsewhere, and we must assiduously avoid exposing ourselves to the same vulnerabilities. The continued civil war and destabilization in Syria undeniably make it more

difficult to acquire the information needed to conduct reliable threat assessments on specific refugees, which is why extra caution is necessary.

The United States has historically taken a leading role in refugee resettlement and humanitarian protections. But we cannot allow the refugee process to become a backdoor for jihadists. Accordingly, our Committee wants to make sure the Administration is weighing the Syrian resettlement question with the utmost concern for the safety of the American people and the long-term security of the U.S. Homeland. Please provide the Committee with a detailed description of the number of Syrian refugees the United States expects to resettle, the timeline for resettlement over the next two years, and an overview of how the interagency will enhance security measures within the vetting process. We further request that you direct the relevant interagency parties involved with this issue, including those copied on this letter, to brief the Committee and its Members at their earliest availability.

If you have questions, please contact Paul Anstine, Mandy Bowers, or Miles Taylor on the Committee's Majority Staff at (202) 226-8417. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Chairman

PETER T. KING
Chairman
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence

CANDICE S. MILLER
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