

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 15, 2015

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
H-305 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
HT-2 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, and Chairwoman Granger:

As you work on the Appropriations proposals for Fiscal Year 2016, we urge you to once again extend the "Lautenberg Amendment," a critical lifeline for threatened religious minorities trapped in Iran. If the program is not renewed, Iranian religious minorities will be stranded in Iran, unable to access the protection of the United States. We appreciate the hard work and leadership that the committee has shown on this issue, including the committee's inclusion of the Lautenberg Amendment in the Fiscal Year 2015 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill, and we urge that the extension be included in the FY2016 spending bill to prevent a lapse that would place these persecuted religious minorities at great risk.

Congress first enacted the Lautenberg Amendment as part of the 1990 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill. It established a presumption of refugee eligibility for historically persecuted groups in the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia, and it has served as a critical lifeline for those affected. The Lautenberg Amendment has been repeatedly extended, and since 2004 it has been expanded to cover Iranian religious minorities facing persecution. Most recently, Congress included this provision in the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015.

Today, the provision is more necessary than ever. Iranian Jews, Christians, and Baha'is continue to suffer systematic persecution and discrimination by the Iranian government. The State Department International Religious Freedom Report and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom have consistently designated Iran as a "country of Particular Concern" for egregious ongoing and systematic violations of religious freedom. The most recent reports state that "despite the June 2013 election of a new and purportedly moderate president, the already-poor religious freedom conditions in Iran continued to deteriorate, particularly for religious minorities" and that "the government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom." At a time when the Iranian regime continues its campaigns to demonize Jews and jail Baha'i leaders for their beliefs, the Lautenberg Amendment preserves a pathway to freedom that is a beacon of hope.

Without the safeguards provided by the Lautenberg Amendment, safe transit countries like Austria may no longer be willing to provide visas to allow religious minorities to be processed on their soil. With no U.S. Embassy in Tehran, persecuted individuals would be forced to flee to dangerous neighboring countries where conditions for asylum seekers are extremely unsafe and access to resettlement is uncertain.

We urge your continued support to include the Lautenberg Amendment in the FY2016 funding bill and thus preserve a safe and reliable mechanism for vulnerable religious minorities to escape harm's way. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



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Member of Congress



TRENT FRANKS
Member of Congress



TED W. LIEU
Member of Congress



ROBERT J. DOLD
Member of Congress



ELIOT L. ENGEL
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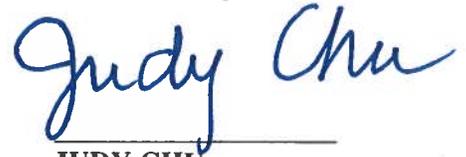
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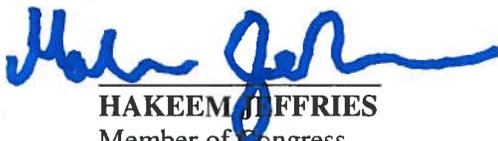
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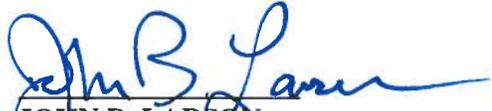
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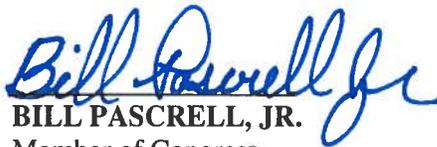
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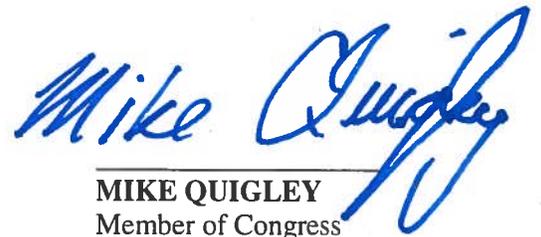
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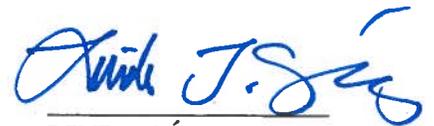
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