

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 18, 2016

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 begin work on the Fiscal Year 2017 Appropriations process, we urge you to once again extend the "Lautenberg Amendment" -- a critical lifeline for threatened religious minorities trapped in Iran. We appreciate the leadership that the committee has shown on this issue in years past, particularly by its most recent inclusion of the Lautenberg Amendment in the Fiscal Year 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113). We look forward to working with you to ensure that this extension is included in any FY2017 spending bill to prevent a lapse that would place these persecuted religious minorities at great risk of being stranded in Iran, unable to access the protection of the United States.

Congress first enacted the Lautenberg Amendment in the 1989 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. Congress included this provision in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016.

Today, the provision is more necessary than ever. Iranian Jews, Christians, and Baha'is 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 "the government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused." 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. Furthermore, due to the conflict in Ukraine, this legislation keeps the door open for certain eligible Ukrainian religious minorities seeking resettlement in the U.S.

We ask for your continued support to include the Lautenberg Amendment in the FY2017 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



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Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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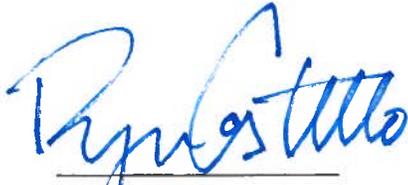
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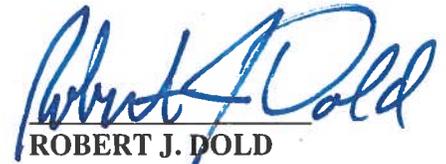
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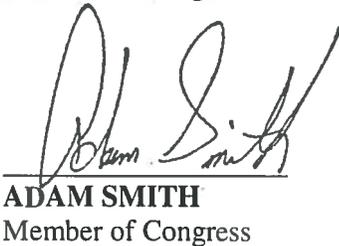
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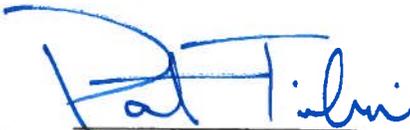
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