December 11, 2015

Senator Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, Room S-230
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House of Representatives
U.S. Capitol Building, Room 232
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Harry Reid
Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, Room 2-221
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. Capitol Building, Room 204
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Oppose proposals to delay or halt admission of Syrian and Iraqi refugees

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Reid, Speaker Ryan, and Minority Leader Pelosi:

On behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA), I write to express the ABA’s opposition to legislative proposals that would delay or halt U.S. resettlement of Syrian, Iraqi, or Muslim refugees. Measures such as those included in the American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act (H.R. 4038) would serve to deny lifesaving protection to those fleeing an urgent humanitarian crisis. We urge you to reject incorporating any such provisions into the omnibus appropriations bill.

The United States has long been a global leader in offering protection to the world’s most vulnerable populations. Denying protection to Syrian and Iraqi refugees would be contrary to this nation’s foundational values as well as to deeply rooted U.S. and international law principles prohibiting discrimination on the basis of national origin, race, or religion.

While the United States must ensure that its refugee admissions process is secure and effective, H.R. 4038 and similar proposals fail to account for the robust screening process that already exists. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group of people who are admitted to the United States. They are subject to rigorous screening by the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and a number of intelligence agencies. Among other measures, this process involves the collection of fingerprints and other biometric information, extensive background and security checks, as well as in-person

interviews. Additional security measures for Syrian refugees already have been implemented, resulting in an overall screening process that takes about two years.  

Discriminatory policies to halt or slow the resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees not only compromise our values, they also undermine U.S. national security interests by reinforcing the very narrative inherent in extremist groups’ own propaganda in a manner that could facilitate their recruitment strategies. Additionally, in a letter expressing opposition to these proposals, a number of former U.S. military, intelligence, diplomatic and security officials noted that “resettlement initiatives help advance U.S. national security interests by supporting the stability of our allies and partners that are struggling to host large numbers of refugees.” These and other high-level former governmental officials have recognized that providing refuge for those fleeing persecution and violence and protecting our national security are not mutually exclusive goals.

As our nation struggles to address challenges posed by the recent horrific attacks at home and abroad, it is important that we do so in ways that uphold the fundamental principles of our democracy. The recent proposals that would effectively delay or halt the resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees do not meet this standard and should be rejected. The ABA strongly urges Congress not to incorporate H.R. 4038 or any similar legislative provisions into the omnibus appropriations bill.

Thank you for consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

Paulette Brown
President

2 http://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening#Enhanced Review.