

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 18, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Obama:

Last week's terrorist attacks in Paris left over 129 innocent civilians murdered, including one American. These terrible attacks were reportedly carried out by at least one person with a Syrian passport who may have claimed refugee status. In light of this development, I believe that we should immediately suspend the admission of Syrian refugees into the United States until we have full confidence that our screening and background check protocols are sufficient. While most refugees are innocent people in dire situations, the safety of the American people must come first, and serious questions have been raised about our protocols for Syrian refugees.

In fact, officials in your administration have raised potential concerns about our ability to fully vet Syrians seeking refugee status:

FBI Director James Comey testified: "We can only query against that which we have collected... and so if someone has never made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interest reflected in our database, we can query our database until the cows come home, but there will be nothing [to] show up because we have no record of them."

FBI Assistant Director Michael Steinbach testified: "The concern in Syria is that we don't have systems in places on the ground to collect information to vet... You're talking about a country that is a failed state, that is — does not have any infrastructure, so to speak. So all of the data sets — the police, the intel services — that normally you would go to seek information don't exist."

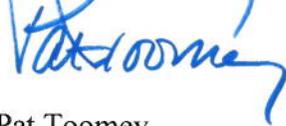
Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said: "We've gotten better at [screening] over the last couple years, but it is a time-consuming process, and one of the challenges we will have is that we're not going to know a whole lot about the individual refugees that come forward from the U.N. High Commission on Refugees for Resettlement and Vetting."

Since the Paris attacks, more than half of U.S. governors from both political parties have come out to oppose the admission of Syrian refugees into their states, and congressional lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have also raised concerns about the government's screening and background check protocols for Syrian refugees.

Accordingly, I ask that you reconsider your current policy on Syrian refugees and halt further admissions until we are fully confident that our screening and background check protocols will protect the American people. Since the consequences of a flawed admissions process for refugees from a known terrorist haven could be catastrophic, suspending the admission of refugees is a prudent step that gives us an opportunity to review and appropriately strengthen our security policies.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pat Toomey", with a large, stylized initial "P" that loops around the start of the name.

Pat Toomey
United States Senate