

November 26, 2015

The Honorable Terry Branstad
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
1007 East Grand Ave
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Governor Branstad:

The twenty-eight undersigned civil rights and community organizations write to you to express deep concern about your recent decision to order all state agencies to halt “any work on Syrian refugee resettlements” and that the federal government should not resettle any Syrian refugees in our state until additional review by intelligence experts. We are all shocked and saddened by the recent attacks but now is not the time to close our hearts and our state to people fleeing violence and terror.

Around the world, more than 60 million individuals are displaced from their homes. Due to the Syrian crisis alone, more than eight million people are internally displaced and four million are seeking refuge in the region and in Europe. Seventy-six percent of these refugees are women and children.

Your recent statement appears triggered by unfounded concerns about the motivations or intentions of refugees. The refugee resettlement program is already the most difficult way to enter the United States, routinely taking individuals several years to be processed. All refugees undergo thorough and rigorous security screenings prior to arriving in the United States, including but not limited to multiple biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks; in-depth, in-person interviews by Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center, and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. In addition, other measures such as mandatory supervisory review of all decisions, random case assignment, and forensic document testing are in place to maintain the security of the refugee resettlement program.

While we must protect against real threats to national security and public safety, we should not let fear and prejudice guide our decisions about whom to welcome to America. We must be careful not to act impulsively in response to this violence; instead we must have a measured and focused response more likely to actually address the root cause. Kneejerk responses that blame refugees do not reflect our shared history and values.

Iowa has a growing immigrant community and in the last few years a little over 1,100 refugees were initially resettled in our state. We urgently call upon you to reconsider your position and to make Iowa a welcoming environment to individuals from around the globe seeking peace and safety. Thank you.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Iowa
American Friends Service Committee Iowa Area Office
Catholic Charities- Refugee Resettlement
Cedar Valley Advocates for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Cedar Valley New Comer Services
Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa
Eastern Iowa Community College
Ethnic Minorities of Burma Advocacy and Resource Center
First Baptist Church of Waterloo, IA
Hawkeye Community College Metro Center
Human Write Communications
Immigrant Allies of Marshalltown
Iowa Asian Alliance
Iowa Justice for Our Neighbors
Lutheran Services in Iowa
Monsoon United Asian Women of Iowa
Our Place
Retired CEO of Community Foundation of Northeast
Sisters of St. Francis
Somalia Community of Des Moines
St. Mary Hispanic Ministry
The Bridge of Storm Lake
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
UI Amnesty International
Vietnamese American Community in Iowa
Visiting Nurse Services of Iowa
WishingWell-IA
YWCA of Black Hawk County

CC: The Honorable Joni Ernst
The Honorable Chuck Grassley
The Honorable Rod Blum
The Honorable Steve King
The Honorable Dave Loebsack
The Honorable David Young
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic Leader
The Honorable Harry Reid, Senate Democratic Leader
The Honorable Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House