

**President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC**

Dear President Obama,

On behalf of the American Iranian Council, I am writing to express my deep concern about the discriminatory consequences of a bill that is currently being considered in the Congress, and is set to be bundled into the Omnibus spending bill that will be voted on shortly. The Visa Waiver Program Improvement Act (H.R.158 in the House and S.2362 in the Senate) could unfairly strip Iranian-Americans and other Americans holding certain dual nationalities of some of their travel rights under the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). We respectfully request that you urgently attend to this Act and rectify its discriminatory consequences.

As you know, this reciprocal program allows for short-term visits to the United States by citizens from 38 countries, including European Union countries, Australia, Japan, and South Korea without requiring a visa. The language in the bill eliminates this privilege for any foreign national who either holds Iraqi, Syrian, Sudanese, or Iranian citizenship, or has traveled to any of these countries since March 2011. Crucially, as VWP is a reciprocal program, the participating countries could respond by applying the same discriminatory regulations to your own citizens.

Americans of Iranian origin are a community of over one million accomplished, educated, creative, and proud people. They have made significant contributions to American society in business, medicine, engineering, technology, academia, and the arts. If this bill is enacted into law and other VWP countries reciprocate, this community of American citizens would, unlike their fellow Americans, be required to apply for a visa anytime they plan a trip to these countries.

Our organization is being flooded by expressions of deep concerns from thousands of distressed Iranian-Americans who are unfairly caught in the abnormal relations between the two governments. Specifically, the bill impacts Iranian-Americans in a roundabout manner by targeting Iran due to its status as a state sponsor of terrorism as determined by the US State Department. The sad irony is that many Iranian-Americans left Iran because of the same problems that you wish to redress in the country and in US-Iran relations.

Moreover, many American citizens of Iranian origin were born and raised in the United States and hold Iranian citizenship by inheritance from their Iranian-origin father. Some in the

community occasionally visit Iran in order to maintain bonds with their friends and family, while others have chosen not to travel back to Iran. While none of the people in this vibrant community of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Zoroastrian and Baha'is have ever adhered to extremism, all of us would be discriminated against if the language in this bill becomes law.

In fact, the tragic San Bernardino terrorist attack had an Iranian-American among the 14 victims who lost their lives as well as another who was a first responder to the scene. Naturally, our community has collectively and unequivocally condemned this murderous act, and denounces any act of terrorism by anyone, anywhere. We are with you and our fellow Americans in helping make America safe and secure. Moreover, we surely understand the need to adopt smart security measures to respond to the threat of terrorism. However, this bill in its current form will unfairly discriminate against Iranian-Americans.

Iranian-Americans trust that the White House and the US Congress will stand with them in protecting our constitutional rights and will not allow for legislation that clearly discriminates against us. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you work with the US Congress in rectifying the discriminatory consequences of the bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hooshang Amirahmadi', written over a horizontal line.

Hooshang Amirahmadi, PhD
President, American Iranian Council

CC.

Honorable Paul Ryan, Speaker of the US House of Representatives
Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader of the US Senate
Honorable Michael McCaul (R-TX), Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee
Honorable Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI), Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee
Honorable Senator J. Bennett Johnston (rt., D-LA), Chairman of the American Iranian Council