

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0403

October 24, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to express our concern with the Department of State's designation of Canopy NWA as a non-familial connection resettlement site. Although we understand the need to assist those fleeing persecution, we have to first and foremost ensure the safety of the Arkansans that we represent.

In our strong opinion, the minimal Congressional oversight and input allowed within the refugee resettlement process has produced alarming findings. During an October 21, 2015 House Homeland Security Committee hearing, FBI Director James Comey highlighted the impossibility of properly vetting Syrian refugees coming from a war-torn nation where we have very little access to data and forensic evidence. Director Comey could not "offer anybody an absolute assurance that there's no risk associated with" admitting Syrian refugees into the United States.

Furthermore, the House Judiciary Committee recently obtained internal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) documents that amplify concerns with the vetting process, specifically the ability to prevent fraud or terrorists from targeting the process as a way to enter the United States. Notably, the document states that much of the refugee processing takes place in refugee camps just outside of war zones, allowing bad actors to enter the camps and purchase the identities of people who have already started the refugee process. Such fraud is especially easy because refugee evidentiary laws are purposely relaxed, not requiring any sort of third-party sponsorship.

Despite these alarming facts, President Obama admitted 13,000 Syrian refugees in Fiscal Year 2016 (FY 2016) and noted that the number of Syrian refugees admitted during FY 2017 will increase. Once these refugees enter the country, the Department of State resettles them with little-to-no collaboration between state governments, leaving governors often unaware of whom is being resettled in their state until after the fact.

Although we are grateful for the heart behind Canopy NWA and the welcoming spirit that is a mark of Arkansans, we are gravely concerned with the current vetting process, as well as the lack of coordination between the Department of State and the actual states resettling refugees.

Congressional oversight has revealed weaknesses in our vetting process and agency concerns with vulnerability to terrorist targeting, and nonetheless, the Administration has moved forward with resettlement in concerned communities. As representatives of the people of Arkansas, we cannot support a program that could threaten the national security of Arkansans and Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Womack", written over a horizontal line.

Steve Womack,
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rick Crawford", written over a horizontal line.

Rick Crawford,
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bruce Westerman", written over a horizontal line.

Bruce Westerman,
Member of Congress