



January 19, 2016

Dear Senator,

The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), a national organization that advances the interests of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans, along with the 80 undersigned Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations, community members, and allies urge you to honor the United States' humanitarian responsibility in protecting Syrian and Iraqi refugees by opposing H.R. 4038- The American Security Against Foreign Enemies Act.

Southeast Asian American communities arose from the largest refugee resettlement in U.S. history, when more than 1.3 million men, women, and children from war-torn countries were resettled after decades of the U.S. war in Vietnam, the Secret War in Laos, and the bombings of Cambodia, followed by the ruthless Khmer Rouge genocide. In 1975 alone, the United States resettled 4,600 refugees from Cambodia, 800 from Laos, and 125,000 from Vietnam, and continued to welcome hundreds of thousands more in need of safe haven in the years to come. It has been over 40 years since the United States opened its doors to vulnerable populations from Southeast Asia in need of humanitarian protection, and our country has only grown stronger. We call on lawmakers to support policies that protect immigrant and refugee communities.

H.R. 4038 would create an unnecessarily burdensome review process that would take years to implement, and effectively shut down ongoing efforts to resettle refugees. The bill would require the Secretary of Homeland Security, the FBI Director, and the Director of National Intelligence to certify to a number of Congressional committees that each refugee from Syria is not a security threat. However, it does not provide guidance on what this certification process would look like, how these agencies will come to a consensus, or what would even constitute a "threat." In the meantime, these additional layers of bureaucracy will halt resettlement efforts for vulnerable populations—a majority of whom are victims of ISIS and state terrorism.

If this process is established, it will significantly increase the amount of time needed to screen refugees, which is already the lengthiest and most robust in the world. Typically, it takes an average of 18-36 months before an individual is even able to set foot on U.S. soil. This, coupled with additional burden of certification among three heads of federal agencies for each refugee, will lead to an unreasonable delay in processing, and could effectively put an end to the refugee resettlement program. Additionally, security and medical clearances, which are typically valid for only limited periods of time, run the risk of expiring as a result of lengthier screening.

H.R. 4038 requires reporting to thirteen congressional committees on each refugee that is considered for resettlement. This is unreasonably burdensome and will further delay the admission of refugees, cause security clearances to expire, and effectively end the program.

Refugees are already the most vetted non-citizens in our country. Prior to even setting foot in the U.S., refugees are subject to a host of biographic and identity investigations; FBI biometric checks of applicants' fingerprints and photographs; in-depth, in-person interviews by well-trained Department of Homeland Security officers; medical screenings; investigations by the National Counterterrorism Center; and other checks by U.S. domestic and international intelligence agencies. Supervisory review of all decisions, random case assignment, inter-agency national security teams, trained document experts, forensic testing of documents, and interpreter monitoring are in place to maintain the security of the refugee resettlement program. Due to technological advances, Syrian refugees are also undergoing iris scans to confirm their identity through the process.

The bill is a waste of resources, as a result of incredibly burdensome and unnecessarily bureaucratic nature of refugee screening and processing. Funds could instead be used to establish and run a more efficient certification process that would be could be used in conducting actual security reviews of refugees and others who are vetted by these agencies.

Support of H.R. 4038, the American SAFE Act, will signify to the world that the U.S. has no interest in being part of the global solution to protect the victims of the violence in Syria and Iraq. Turning our backs on our humanitarian responsibility is not only un-American but morally unconscionable. These efforts will waste taxpayer dollars. Even worse, it will do nothing to make our country safer, and it will continue to put the safety of refugees and immigrants at risk.

For these reasons we ask that you OPPOSE H.R. 4038. We appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
ACT for Women and Girls
Asian American Advancing Justice-LA
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC
Asian Law Alliance
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network (CPEHN)
Council of Mexican Federations
Khmer Student Association at WSU
Lao American Association, Inc.
Mutual Housing California
National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Form (NAPAWF)
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)

National Korean American Service and Education Consortium
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
Seattle Immigrant and Refugee Commission
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN)
The Center for APA Women

Individual Signers:

Maureen Duignan (Alameda, CA)	Elizabeth Gale White Nyseth (Athens, GA)
Srida Moua (Berkeley, CA)	Tuyet Mai Hoang (Urbana, IL)
Arwin Cotas (Concord, CA)	Alefiyah Pishori (Northbrook, IL)
Michelle Yeung (Fremont, CA)	Minnah Farook (Lexington, KY)
Lowell Ens (Fresno, CA)	Cherry Lim (Boston, MA)
Thao Xiong (Fresno, CA)	Jamie Sharp (Bethesda, MD)
Kim Phan (Garden Grove, CA)	Razia Kosi (Ellicott City, MD)
Suza Khy (Long Beach, CA)	Charmaine Willis (Durham, ME)
Alison Lieu (Los Angeles, CA)	Grace Hung (Lansing, MI)
Cecilia Ngo (Los Angeles, CA)	Anna Nyseth (Columbia, MO)
Ethan Nguyen (Los Angeles, CA)	Joy Lor (St. Paul, MN)
Jan Okabe-Wong, Psy.D. (Los Angeles, CA)	Elaine Wilson (Franklin Park, NJ)
Justin Nguyen (Los Angeles, CA)	Ahmed Alif (New York, NY)
Lisa Phan (Los Angeles, CA)	Angie Tran (Oklahoma City, OK)
Marcus Degnan (Los Angeles, CA)	Bonnie Ell (Brookings, OR)
Myca (Los Angeles, CA)	Candy Nhoybouakong (Providence, RI)
Ova Saopeng (Los Angeles, CA)	Anh-Thu Nguyen (Garland, TX)
Uyen Hoang (Los Angeles, CA)	Alan Lotrakul (Houston, TX)
Vang Xiong (Marysville, CA)	Christopher Kang (Arlington, VA)
Kathy Huynh (Oakland, CA)	David Yang (Richland, WA)
Nga Bui (Oakland, CA)	Sophia Som (Snohomish, WA)
Nicol (Oakland, CA)	
Nwe Oo (Oakland, CA)	
Thear Chum (Oakland, CA)	
Isami Arifuku (Pinole, CA)	
Kassy Saepunh (Sacramento, CA)	
Linh Chuong (Sacramento, CA)	
Rachel Iskow (Sacramento, CA)	
Quynh Nguyen (San Diego, CA)	
Katelyn Wendt (San Diego, CA)	
Manuel La Fontaine (San Francisco, CA)	
Meiyang Liu Kadaba (San Francisco, CA)	
Sharon Daraphonhdeth (San Francisco, CA)	
Mita Prakash (San Jose, CA)	
Quynh Nguyen (San Jose, CA)	
Vicky (San Jose, CA)	
Phillip Rama (Suisun, CA)	
Maritza Perez (Washington, D.C.)	
Ricky Ly (Orlando, FL)	