Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20515

September 11, 2014

The Honorable Hal Rogers  
Chairman 
Committee on Appropriations 
H-305 The Capitol 
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations 
1016 Longworth House Office Building 
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey,

We write to urge you to take action to once again extend the “Lautenberg Amendment,” a critical lifeline for threatened religious minorities trapped in Iran. If the program is not renewed, Iranian religious minorities will be stranded in Iran, unable to access the protection of the United States. Congress included this provision in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014 and it was included in the Fiscal Year 2015 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill passed by your Committee in June. The extension must be included again in any continuing resolution to prevent a lapse that would place these persecuted religious minorities at great risk.

The Lautenberg Amendment, first enacted as part of the 1989 Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill, established a presumption of refugee eligibility for historically persecuted groups in the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia. Since 2003, the Lautenberg Amendment has been expanded to cover Iranian religious minorities facing persecution.

Today, the provision is more necessary than ever as Iranian Jews, Christians, and Baha’is suffer systematic persecution and discrimination by the Iranian government. The State Department International Religious Freedom Report and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom have consistently designated Iran as a “Country of Particular Concern” for egregious ongoing and systematic violations of religious freedom, and last year’s report states that “religious freedom in Iran deteriorated further from an already egregious situation.” At a time when the Iranian regime continues its campaigns to demonize Jews and jail Baha’i leaders for their beliefs, the Lautenberg Amendment preserves a pathway to freedom that is a beacon of hope.

Without the safeguards provided by the Lautenberg Amendment, past experience has shown that safe transit countries like Austria would no longer be willing to provide visas to allow religious minorities to be processed on their soil. With no U.S. Embassy in Tehran, persecuted individuals would be forced to flee to dangerous neighboring countries such as Pakistan, where religious minorities also face grave danger.

[Handwritten note]  
Current 10 Dem^ Members of Judiciary  
including Congers, LoBego, Cicilline (the amendment sponsor) 
Luetkener, Nadler and others.
We urge you to act in an expeditious manner to reauthorize the Lautenberg Amendment and thus preserve a safe and reliable mechanism for vulnerable religious minorities to escape harm’s way.

Sincerely,

HENRY A. WAXMAN  
Member of Congress

ADAM B. SCHIFF  
Member of Congress

ROBERT A. BRADY  
Member of Congress

TAMMY DUCKWORTH  
Member of Congress

MIKE POMPEO  
Member of Congress

DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ  
Member of Congress

ERIK PAULSEN  
Member of Congress

DAVID N. CICILLINE  
Member of Congress

LEONARD LANCE  
Member of Congress

TRENT FRANKS  
Member of Congress

FRANK R. WOLF  
Member of Congress

FREDERICA S. WILSON  
Member of Congress

JACKIE SPEIER  
Member of Congress

PETER J. ROSKAM  
Member of Congress

WILLIAM R. KEATING  
Member of Congress

AARON SCHOCK  
Member of Congress

RANDY HULTGREN  
Member of Congress

PETER T. KING  
Member of Congress
JOHN LEWIS
Member of Congress

JOHN A. YARMUTH
Member of Congress

JOSEPH R. PITTS
Member of Congress

ALAN GRAYSON
Member of Congress

JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress

ERIC SWALWELL
Member of Congress

RANDY K. WEBER, SR.
Member of Congress

STEVE STIVERS
Member of Congress

ADAM KINZINGER
Member of Congress

SAM GRAVES
Member of Congress

JIM MCDERMOTT
Member of Congress

EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress

MIKE QUIGLEY
Member of Congress

RUSH HOLT
Member of Congress

ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ
Member of Congress

SANDER M. LEVIN
Member of Congress

GRACE MENG
Member of Congress

JOE LINGREN
Member of Congress

MICHAEL E. CAPUANO
Member of Congress

GLORIA NEGRETE MCLEOD
Member of Congress