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The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

I am writing to you today as a constituent to share my concerns about many of the decisions that have been announced by yourself and other legislators in the recent days following the attacks in Paris.

I understand that it is your responsibility as the governor of South Carolina to help ensure the safety of South Carolinians, and I appreciate this fact. However, I am honestly distressed and deeply disappointed by the rashness with which many state governors and members of Congress have responded to the events of the past week. After any sort of terrorist attack, there is always ample opportunity to encourage and capitalize on one of the most prevalent human emotions – fear. I sincerely hope that you will reconsider joining the ranks of other state governors who have contributed to the recent outpouring of intolerance and fear mongering.

In particular, I am disappointed in your recent request to Secretary Kerry that Syrian refugees not be resettled in the state of South Carolina. In other fairly recent situations in our state, I was pleasantly impressed with your decisions – you called for the Confederate flag to be removed from the Statehouse after the attack in Charleston (also an act of terrorism), and I applauded your decision. It was a rational and well-reasoned one; it helped to promote tolerance and solidarity among individuals in our state, and it sent a message of understanding and compassion to marginalized citizens. As a result, racial tensions in South Carolina have not escalated to the level of that in many other states.

In that same spirit, I urge you to reconsider your decision in regard to refugees from Syria. It is my understanding that refugees undergo an intense screening process, making the odds of an extremist entering the US very low. However, I understand that there may continue to be a small risk – and I suspect that legislators will remain adamant about this fact. I encourage you to consider instead the risks that you create by turning away these people, who are fleeing from the same terrorist group that was responsible for the attacks last Friday. The goal of an organization like ISIS is to create an atmosphere of fear, and to use this fear to drive a further wedge between Western, “Christian”

societies and Muslim and Arab communities. In doing so, they will succeed in extending the present conflict, and they will continue to recruit individuals who feel excluded by countries like the United States. Please consider this.

Please also consider the moral obligation that we in the United States face. As we look back in history and reflect on actions that we regret and that were later condemned on moral grounds (such as the instance in which the United States turned away Jewish refugees during the Holocaust), I hope that you will carefully consider how we should react in this present situation. I am also continually frustrated with many state governors and members of Congress who claim that the United States is filled with the Christian faith. Leaving aside the fact that we have no official national religion and that our country is based on a separation of church and state, I will humor the assumption that our culture is largely permeated with Christian ideals – after all, many government officials and policy-makers continually appeal to their religious beliefs when justifying their legislative decisions. So I ask: how is turning away refugees at all a reflection of the Christian faith? Is it not simply the hypocritical result of fiery political rhetoric aimed at appeasing a scared and largely intolerant portion of the population?

I am saddened that you have joined the ranks of other governors who have caved to a terrified and vocal minority. Perhaps you should look to the reactions of Governor Markell of Delaware or Governor Inslee of Washington, individuals who are combatting fear and intolerance with compassion. After all, isn't compassion the best act of defiance against terrorism?

Again, I thank you for your service. I hope you will consider these issues – South Carolina could indeed continue to be a “state that has proudly welcomed refugees from around the world,” and an example to other states in our country.

Sincerely,



Christine Schalkoff
Clemson University

cc: The Honorable Lindsey Graham
The Honorable Tim Scott
The Honorable Jim Clyburn
The Honorable Joe Wilson
The Honorable Trey Gowdy
The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
The Honorable Jeff Duncan
The Honorable Mark Sanford
The Honorable Tom Rice