

December 18, 2015

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

Dear Governor Haley,

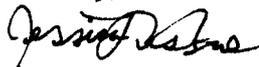
I am writing to in regards to your stance in the national conversation surrounding the United States' acceptance of Syrian refugees. I read the request you submitted to Secretary Kerry last month, and I understand that, as of this month, refugees have been resettled in South Carolina despite your request. While I admire your commitment to our security, I believe the furor over refugee screening is misdirected and distracts us from accurately understanding the Syrian crisis and the role of our country in its alleviation. As South Carolina moves into 2016 as a host state for Syrian refugees, I ask you to build an atmosphere of understanding and welcome for our new residents.

The Paris attacks did not implicate our current process for reviewing and accepting refugees, since none of the perpetrators participated in the American screening process. The fact that two attackers followed refugees into Greece confirms Europe's difficulty in dealing with open borders and the recent migratory influx. This confirmation should strengthen, not deter, our determination to assist with resettlement. I know you are aware of the United States' rigorous immigration process for refugees: an 18-24 month review conducted through the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Human Services, and Federal Bureau of Investigation. Furthermore, due to the lengthy and multi-faceted nature of the vetting process, it is unlikely—and unprecedented—that a terrorist would choose this avenue to enter the United States.

I work in collegiate international education because I believe that cultural exchange builds understanding between people of different countries. The resettlement of Syrian refugees in South Carolina creates another opportunity for this exchange. Having lived and studied in the Middle East, I can attest to the need for greater respect and understanding between Americans and people from this region. However, alarmist narratives in the media and political sphere have created an environment of fear and prejudice that will inhibit refugees' integration in our communities. I ask for you to work to dispel these attitudes at the highest level, and make our state a place of security and welcome.

Thank you for your consideration and work, and best wishes for this new year.

Sincerely,



Jessica Mussro
744 Berkeley Drive
Clemson, SC 29631
jess.mussro@gmail.com