

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 15, 2011

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman, Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on State,
Foreign Operations and Related Programs
Committee on Appropriations
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Inouye and Leahy, Vice Chairman Cochran, and Ranking Member Graham:

We urge you to include in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations bill the "Lautenberg Amendment," a critical lifeline for individuals fleeing religious persecution. This amendment has been included in the State, Foreign Operations Appropriations bill every year since FY 1990, but expired on June 1, 2011.

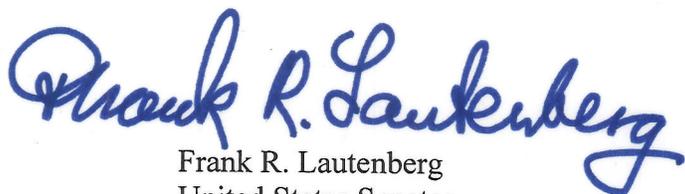
The Lautenberg Amendment began as a provision of the Foreign Operations Appropriations Act for FY 1990, when thousands of Soviet Christians and Jews facing religious persecution were denied refugee status by the U.S. The Lautenberg Amendment solved this problem by giving clear guidance to immigration officers, enabling persecuted individuals to come live in safety in the United States. In 2003, when the same problem occurred with Jews, Baha'i and Christians in Iran, Congress expanded the protection of the Lautenberg Amendment to Iranian religious minorities.

With President Ahmadinejad in power in Iran, the Lautenberg Amendment is needed more than ever. Every year since the enactment of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, the President has designated Iran as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom violations. The 2011 Annual Report of the bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom states, "The government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused."

Without the Lautenberg Amendment providing a safe means of exit, Iranian religious minorities will be forced to cross the border to Turkey or Pakistan, where conditions for asylum seekers (particularly non-Muslims) are extremely unsafe, and access to resettlement uncertain.

We urge you to work to renew the Lautenberg Amendment and maintain this critical lifeline. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,



Frank R. Lautenberg
United States Senator



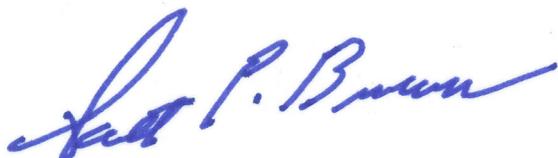
Mark Kirk
United States Senator



Carl Levin
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Scott P. Brown
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Kirsten E. Gillibrand
United States Senator



Dean Heller
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
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Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Herb Kohl
United States Senator

Robert Menendez
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

Jack Reed
United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sheldon Whitehouse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator