

The Honorable Senator Christopher Dodd
Office of US Senator Christopher Dodd
Great Meadow Road
Wethersfield, CT

March 5, 2002

Dear Senator Dodd,

This communication is on behalf of the Iranian-American community within the State of Connecticut to express our support for your efforts to improve United States' national security. At the same time, we would like to express our deep concerns about the proposed Section 306 of the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001 (S. 1749) that will impose undue hardship on the lives of our community members, without improving U.S. and global security.

We urge you to support the revision of Section 306. At a minimum, we appeal to you to ensure that a definition of standards and a workable procedure be included that would enable the Consul to determine those applicants that do not pose a threat to the safety or national security of the United States and to ensure that such applicants will not be discriminated against systematically or categorically rejected.

The Iranian-American community has been noted to be amongst the most affluent minority group in the United States. With a population of nearly one million individuals, 56% of Iranian-Americans hold Bachelor degrees and more than 26% hold advanced graduate degrees, making them the highest educated minority group in the United States. Iranian-Americans have always contributed to the growing economy of the United States. Iranian-Americans are the founders of some 280 major national firms, and the CEOs of more than 400 national companies. The total contribution of our community to the United States economy has been estimated to be at more than \$400 billion. As an integral part of this society, improved security for our airports and borders is of a paramount concern to us.

The September 11 tragedy has caused grief across all the diverse communities within the United States and the affluent Iranian-American community is, by no means, an exception. We welcome measures proposed by the United States Senate to tighten border control and improve immigration laws, as a preventative measure to possible future attacks. As such, you have our utmost support in your proactive ambition to cosponsor the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2001 (S. 1749), as a first step in enhanced border control. However, we would like to express our strong opposition to section 306 of the proposed bill, which vehemently denies visas to persons of Iranian nationality, less a determination that such individuals do not pose a national security risk to the United States. It is our sincere belief that the outcome of this bill will result in unjustified affliction on the Iranian-American community members without marked improvement in United States' security.

Considering the fact that Iranian students, scholars and visitors are already undergoing an extensive background check for each entry into the United States, setting additional standards for the issuance of visas is an impractical and insufficient step. Furthermore, it sends a strong conflicting message of tolerance of discrimination against individuals based on their ethnicity. We submit to you that these are not the principles by which this

country was founded. This, in fact, is in contradiction, to the United States' undying fight for freedom and equality. While the measures suggested in other sections of the bill might have prevented the events of September 11 from happening, section 306 would not have done so. We respectfully remind you that not one of the alleged terrorists was an Iranian citizen, Iranian Student, or an Iranian-American. In fact, the Iranian-American community has shared no less grief for the perished souls than the rest of the nation.

Section 306 is in contradiction to a recent Senate resolution (173) condemning violence and discrimination against Iranian-Americans and their family members in the wake of September 11 terrorist attacks. As law-abiding citizens, we are concerned that setting additional and unnecessary restrictions, strictly based on ethnicity, is impractical, will make it next to impossible for Iranian students, scholars, and visitors to prove that they are not a risk to U.S. national security, thus resulting in a categorical ban on visas for such individuals.

Senator, the invaluable cultural exchanges between Iran and the United States stands to lose a great deal in this discriminatory restriction on nonimmigrant visa. As always, the strength of the United States, as a nation, is the direct result of the vast cultural diversity of its ethnic communities. The Iranian-American community forms a vibrant, peaceful, and law-abiding element of this society. The overwhelming majority of student visa applicants from Iran are amongst the brightest and most open-minded members of their generation. This is a time for dialogue not segregation.

Again, we urge you to support the revision of Section 306 to ensure that a definition of standards and a workable procedure be included that would enable the Consul to determine those applicants that do not pose a threat to the safety or national security of the United States and to ensure that such applicants will not be discriminated against systematically or categorically rejected.

We thank you for your attention to this most important matter.