

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

ROBERT BENTLEY  
GOVERNOR



STATE CAPITOL  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130

(334) 242-7100  
FAX: (334) 242-3282

## STATE OF ALABAMA

December 2, 2015

Denis R. McDonough  
Assistant to the President and White House Chief of Staff  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. McDonough:

Thank you for your ongoing correspondence addressing Governors' concerns regarding the refugee resettlement program. However, once again, I must express to you my growing frustration with the lack of answers my office is receiving regarding this very important issue. I stated publicly on November 15 that Alabama has not and will not receive any Syrian refugees in the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, based on my concerns for the safety and security of the people of my state. As you know, approximately 29 Governors have since followed and also expressed their concerns with the refugee vetting process. Based on the two past telephone conversations held between Governors' Offices and the Administration, I believe my fellow colleagues would agree that the lack of communication with the White House, as well as the absence of readily available information regarding the refugee intake and vetting process, are issues of great concern.

You stated in your letter dated November 30, a proposal to partner with the National Governors Association (NGA) to give Governors more routine and regular access to information about refugee resettlement in the states. I cannot accept that proposal as a workable solution. There should be no filter between the federal government and state governments, and especially between the President and Governors regarding an issue of such high importance as that of national security. As I expressed in my letter dated November 24, as it stands now, Alabama has not received any mandated reports regarding refugees of any national origin. I do not believe placing a filter such as NGA between the Administration and my office addresses this current problem, nor does it solve future concerns regarding the vetting process.

Mr. Denis R. McDonough

December 2, 2015

Page Two

Please allow me to remind you of my deep concerns I expressed in my November 24 correspondence:

“The lack of reporting by these volunteer organizations stands to further demonstrate my deep concern for the refugee vetting process. As Governor, I take very seriously my responsibility to ensure the safety and security of Alabamians. The Refugee vetting process, in my opinion, is structured in such a way that excludes states from any oversight and severely limits the amount of information the states may have regarding refugees. Given my responsibility as Governor, this raises a deep concern. As the Administration gives strong consideration to the concerns of Governors for the much-needed revision of the vetting process, please keep those concerns I have expressed in mind. “

While you describe the refugee vetting program as “the most robust screening process for any category of individuals seeking admission in the United States,” I must point out the missing element of state government involvement in that process. The only time state government is made aware of a refugee admission in Alabama is through the required quarterly reports from a volunteer, non-governmental organization (NGO), Catholic Social Services, located in Mobile, Alabama. Once again, Alabama has not received a single required report on any refugees of any origin from this organization.

As I have discovered and shared with you, I have great concerns with the refugee vetting process, particularly the lack of state involvement, oversight or knowledge. This creates a growing concern that the intent appears to be an effort to circumvent states and our ability to adequately protect our people and ensure the safety of our citizens. Creating another non-governmental layer between the federal government and state government, as you have proposed, cannot and does not address this concern.

Thank you for your consideration on this very important matter. Please do not hesitate to reach my office by phone or other preferred correspondence. I look forward to further discussions with you on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Bentley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert Bentley  
Governor