

Unites States Senate
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC

January 17, 2017

Dear Members of Congress:

We are national religious, secularist, civil rights and other organizations that, while diverse, are united in efforts to advance religious freedom. We write to urgently express our increasing concerns about policies the President-elect proposed during his campaign, and cabinet appointments he has more recently announced, which we believe run counter to this founding tenet of our democracy. We strongly urge you to support core principles of the First Amendment and religious freedom in our country by denouncing anti-Muslim rhetoric and policy proposals.

This week the United States celebrated Religious Freedom Day 2017, which marks the 231st anniversary of the Virginia General Assembly's adoption of the landmark Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. This statute marks religious freedom for all, on the basis of the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Our Founding Fathers believed — as did others involved in drafting and adopting the statute and the First Amendment itself — that religious freedom is a fundamental and expansive right. This means religious freedom for all, not some.

As organizations representing a diverse set of religious and cultural perspectives, we deeply value and strive to safeguard the rights of individuals and families who are Muslim. As policy makers, soldiers, business owners, doctors, teachers, among many other professions, and as cherished neighbors, friends, and loved ones, Muslims are a fundamental part of this country and have been since before it was founded.

Policies that the President-elect and several cabinet nominees have espoused — to target individuals in the United States on the basis of religion — are not only offensive but unconstitutional. The proposed policies to bar Muslims from entering the US and to register Muslims currently living in our communities, for example, alarmingly parallel the deeply shameful policy of interning Japanese Americans on the basis of political fear-mongering after the US entered World War II. Supporters of the President-elect have shamefully cited that horrific moment in our nation's history as precedent for singling out our Muslim family, friends and neighbors.

Anti-Muslim rhetoric is closely related to violence committed against Muslims on the basis of religion, or those perceived to be Muslims. As anti-Muslim rhetoric became more prevalent during the presidential campaign, the rate of crimes against Muslims also increased. Establishing anti-Muslim policies, such as forcing Muslims to register on a national scale, goes directly against the American principles of freedom of religious belief and of expression. True religious freedom means that the same right that protects the liberty of Christians, Jews, or Hindus, for example, to pray, attend services and promote their views in public, protects the right of Muslims to do the same.

As we mark another anniversary of religious freedom in our country, we ask you to help protect this founding principle and preserve our democracy. We strongly urge you to denounce anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies — and affirmatively work to protect true religious freedom for all individuals and families nationwide.

Sincerely,

30 for 30 Campaign
Abortion Care Network
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
Advocates for Youth
Alliance of Baptists
American Atheists
American Center for Outreach
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Humanist Association
American Muslim Advisory Council
American Sexual Health Association
Americans for Religious Liberty
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Catholics for Choice
Center for Advancing Innovative Policy
Center for Inquiry
Center for Reproductive Rights
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Civil Liberties & Public Policy Program
Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)
DignityUSA
East Coast Asian American Student Union (ECAASU)
EmpathyWorks LLC
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
First Congregational Church of Palo Alto, UCC
FORGE, Inc.
Forward Together
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network)
HIAS
HIV - Prevention Justice Alliance
Ibis Reproductive Health
Illinois Accountability Initiative
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda
Institute for Science and Human Values
Interfaith Action for Human Rights
Kaufman Interfaith Institute
Lady Parts Justice League
Medical Students for Choice

Momentum Institute
Muftah
Multifaith Voices for Peace and Justice
Muslims for Progressive Values
Nasiha Counseling
National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Association of College and University Chaplains
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Coalition of American Nuns
National Council of Jewish Women
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund
National Network of Abortion Funds
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance (NQAPIA)
National Women's Law Center
New Ways Ministry
Nueces Mosque
Nursing Students for Sexual & Reproductive Health
Poligon Education Fund
Political Research Associates
Positive Women's Network - USA
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Religious Institute
Reproaction
Secular Coalition for America
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS)
Shoulder to Shoulder
SisterReach
Sisters of St. Francis Justice, Peace and Care for Creation Committee
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Surge Reproductive Justice
The Body is Not An Apology
The Doula Project
The Revolutionary Love Project
Third Wave Fund
Tri Faith Initiative, Omaha, NE
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

Unitarian Universalist Association
Witness to Mass Incarceration
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
Women's Health Specialists of California
Women's Ordination Conference (WOC)