

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 12, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. President:

We strongly condemn the Department of Homeland Security's recent enforcement operation targeting refugee mothers and children from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The DHS operation has generated widespread fear and panic in immigrant communities and has far-reaching impacts beyond the alleged targets for removal. The operation raises numerous due process concerns including meaningful access to legal counsel for mothers and children after apprehension and DHS officers reportedly using deceptive tactics to gain entrance into private residences. For these reasons and others, we believe that this operation should be immediately suspended until we can ensure no mother or child will be sent back to a country where they would face persecution, torture or death.

Globally, there are currently more refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons – an estimated 60 million – than at any time since World War II. You and your Administration have upheld time-honored American values by offering refuge to those fleeing violence and disorder in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. We commend you for that.

However, these same fundamental American values have not been applied in your Administration's policies towards Central American refugee mothers and children. The brutality of violence in Central America is undeniable, and yet this Administration has failed to provide a comprehensive refugee solution for those seeking international refugee protection. According to data shared by DHS, 85% of Central American families in detention have established threshold eligibility for refugee protection. Rather than preserving our commitment to refugee protection, your Administration continues to pursue policies that treat Central American refugees as an immigration enforcement matter.

Thus far, your Administration has responded to the Central American refugee crisis with an emphasis on deterrence rather than the need for a regional refugee solution. Your Administration has used family detention, Spanish language communication campaigns in Central America urging people not to come to the United States, and financial assistance to Mexico to deter, arrest, and return those fleeing violence. This strategy has proven to be ineffective, as mothers and children continue to arrive at our Southwest border seeking refugee protection. Desperate Central American mothers and children will continue to flee to the United States and seek protection, regardless of the deterrent actions taken by this Administration.

The recent operation to apprehend and remove families – several of whom reported inadequate legal representation – is the latest failure in this enforcement strategy. The fact that several of these families were subsequently granted emergency stays of removal indicates that the system has failed these refugees, notwithstanding final administrative removal orders. A final administrative removal order does not necessarily mean that these mothers and children do not have legitimate claims for refugee protection. We are gravely concerned that DHS may have already removed mothers and children from the United States and returned them to violent and dangerous situations in their home countries.

The crisis in our hemisphere will only be resolved when the United States engages in a comprehensive, regional solution to this refugee crisis. This solution should include refugee screening and resettlement, the use of safe havens in appropriate third countries, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for those individuals in the United States, the use of priority refugee processing, and other humanitarian remedies. It is critical that this approach include cooperation with other countries in the Western Hemisphere. The violence in the Northern Triangle of Central America and the resulting refugee flow affects our entire region, and the United States' solution should include a regional refugee resettlement program as well as increased capacity building of asylum systems in neighboring countries.

This comprehensive approach should also include collaboration with non-governmental organizations with expertise in international refugee protection such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Organizations such as UNHCR can assist the United States and our regional partners in screening refugees and can provide critical guidance regarding the best practices for refugee care and management.

The goal of this comprehensive refugee approach should be to ensure that Central American refugees, particularly mothers and children, are able to live free from an endless cycle of violence and persecution. It is time to start working towards a solution that provides a practical and humane response to the mothers and children from Central America fleeing for their lives and seeking safety and protection. Failure to provide this comprehensive solution will continue to lead to disorder at our border and will further a sense of unease across the United States.

We urge you to immediately halt the current enforcement actions towards Central American mothers and children and take steps to engage in a comprehensive effort with our hemispheric partners to address this regional refugee crisis in an appropriate humanitarian manner.

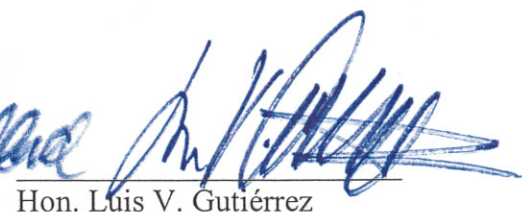
Sincerely,



Hon. Zoe Lofgren



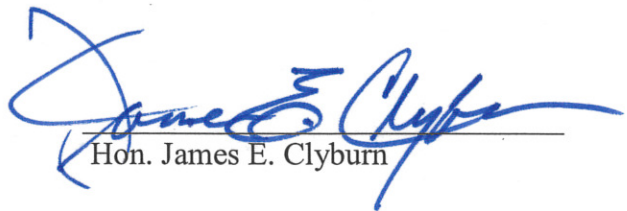
Hon. Lucille Roybal-Allard



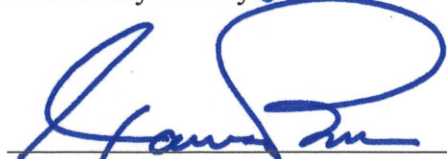
Hon. Luis V. Gutiérrez



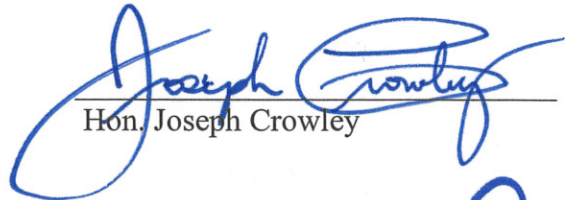
Hon. Steny H. Hoyer



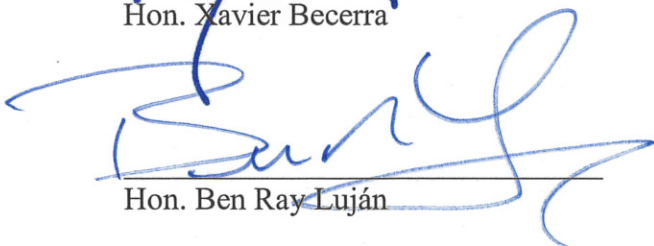
Hon. James E. Clyburn



Hon. Xavier Becerra



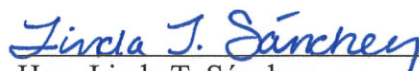
Hon. Joseph Crowley



Hon. Ben Ray Luján



Hon. G. K. Butterfield



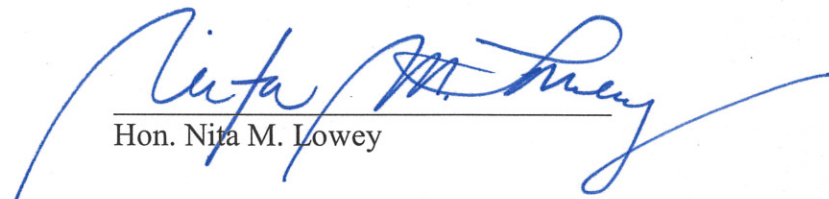
Hon. Linda T. Sánchez



Hon. Judy Chu



Hon. John Conyers, Jr.



Hon. Nita M. Lowey



Hon. Adam Smith



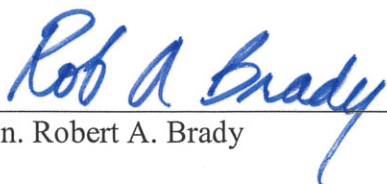
Hon. Frank Pallone, Jr.



Hon. Maxine Waters



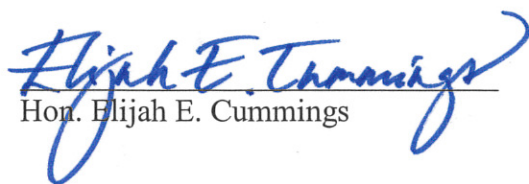
Hon. Eliot L. Engel




Hon. Robert A. Brady



Hon. Raúl M. Grijalva



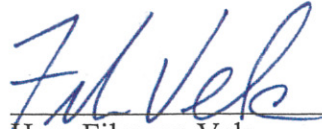
Hon. Elijah E. Cummings



Hon. Louise McIntosh Slaughter



Hon. Mark Pocan



Hon. Filemon Vela



Hon. Bonnie Watson Coleman



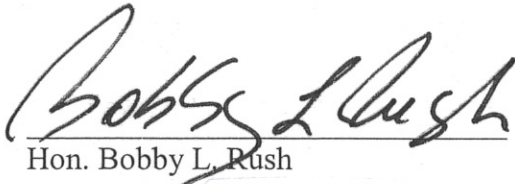
Hon. Debbie Dingell



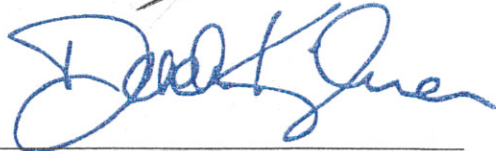
Hon. Mark Takai



Hon. Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan



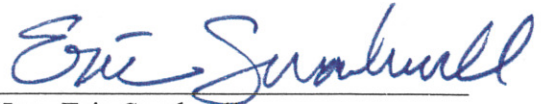
Hon. Bobby L. Rush



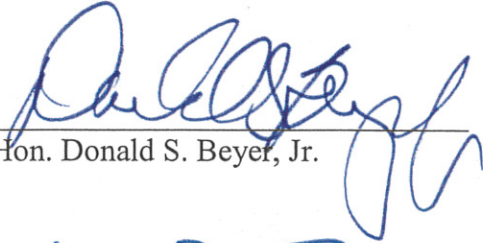
Hon. Derek Kilmer



Hon. Grace F. Napolitano



Hon. Eric Swalwell



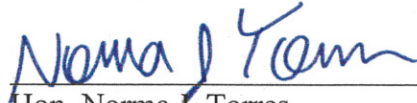
Hon. Donald S. Beyer, Jr.



Hon. Mark DeSaulnier



Hon. Ted Lieu



Hon. Norma J. Torres



Hon. Brenda L. Lawrence



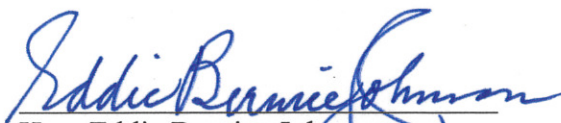
Hon. Niki Tsongas




Hon. Brian Higgins




Hon. Pedro R. Pierluisi


Hon. Eddie Bernice Johnson

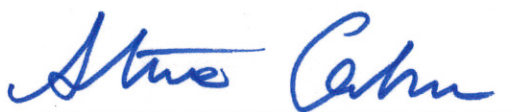

Hon. Nydia M. Velázquez



Hon. Adam B. Schiff

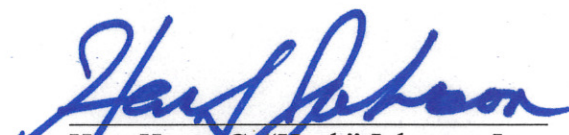

Hon. Carolyn B. Maloney


Hon. Chris Van Hollen



Hon. Donna F. Edwards


Hon. Steve Cohen

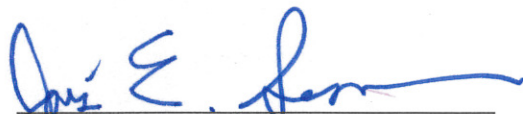

Hon. Sheila Jackson Lee


Hon. Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.


Hon. Jerrold Nadler

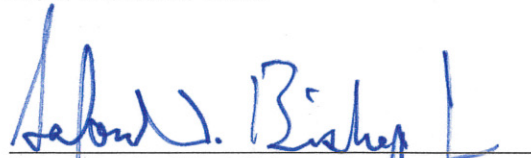

Hon. Charles B. Rangel


Hon. Marcy Kaptur



Hon. José E. Serrano

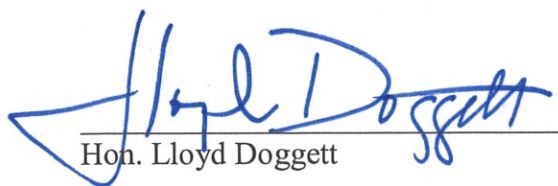

Hon. David E. Price


Hon. Rosa L. DeLauro


Hon. Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.


Hon. Gene Green


Hon. Alcee L. Hastings


Hon. Lloyd Doggett


Hon. Chaka Fattah


Hon. Danny K. Davis

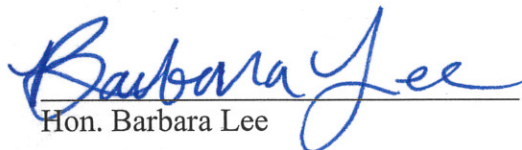

Hon. Diana DeGette

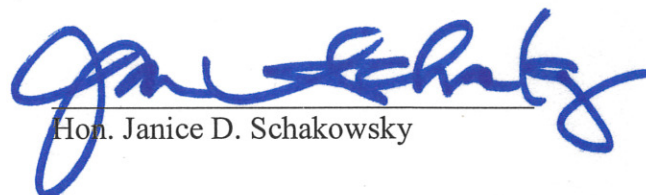

Hon. Rubén Hinojosa

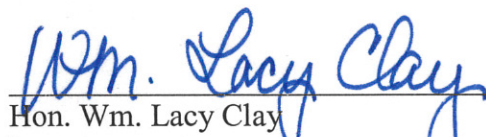

Hon. Bill Pascrell Jr.


Hon. Gregory W. Meeks


Hon. Lois Capps

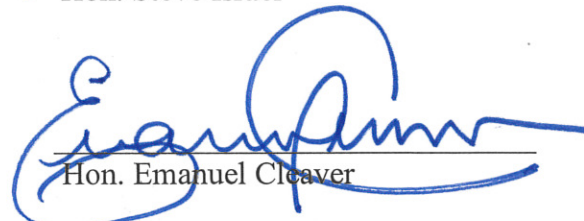

Hon. Barbara Lee

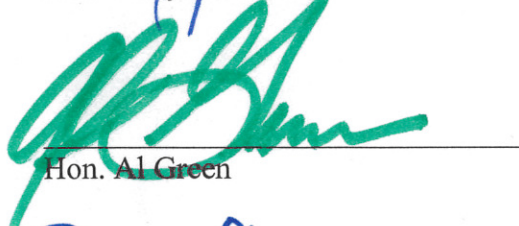

Hon. Janice D. Schakowsky

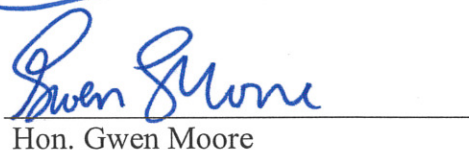

Hon. Wm. Lacy Clay

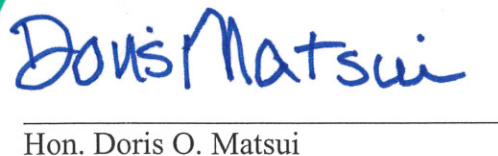

Hon. Steve Israel


Hon. Betty McCollum


Hon. Emanuel Cleaver


Hon. Al Green


Hon. Gwen Moore

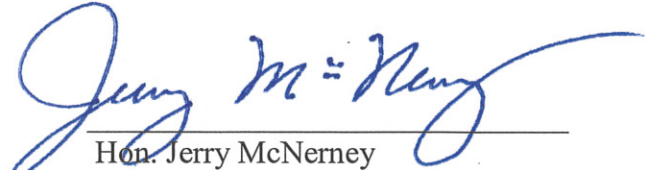

Hon. Doris O. Matsui

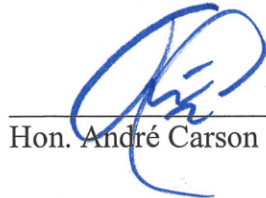

Hon. Albio Sires


Hon. Yvette D. Clarke


Hon. Keith Ellison


Hon. Peter Welch


Hon. Jerry McNerney

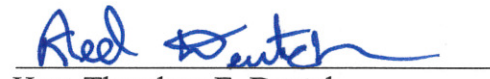

Hon. André Carson


Hon. Gerald E. Connolly


Hon. Chellie Pingree


Hon. Paul Tonko

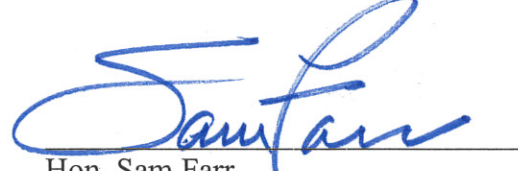

Hon. Mike Quigley


Hon. Theodore E. Deutch

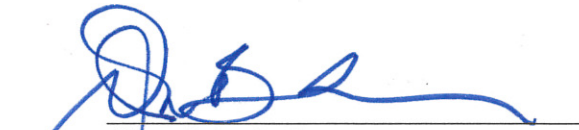

Hon. David N. Cicilline


Hon. Eleanor Holmes Norton

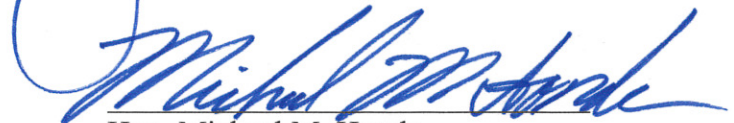

Hon. Jim McDermott

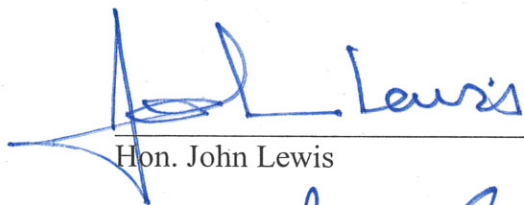

Hon. Sam Farr

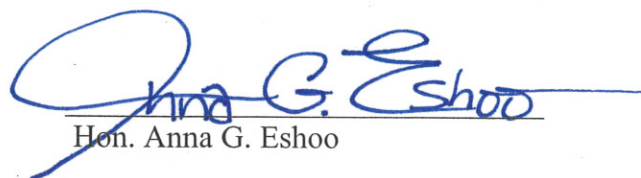

Hon. Earl Blumenauer

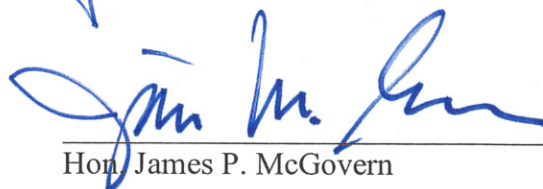

Hon. John B. Larson


Hon. Michael E. Capuano

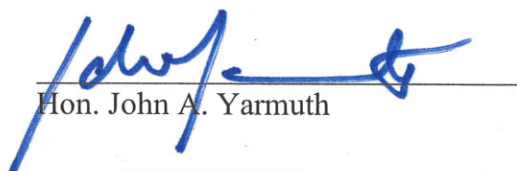

Hon. Michael M. Honda


Hon. John Lewis

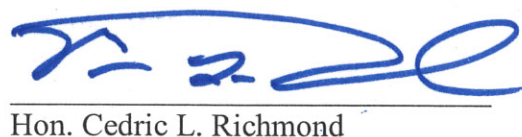

Hon. Anna G. Eshoo


Hon. James P. McGovern


Hon. Mike Thompson

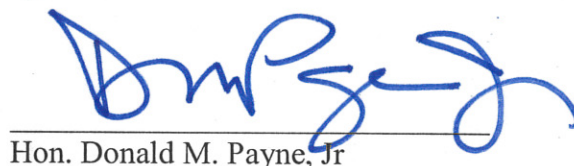

Hon. John A. Yarmuth


Hon. Karen Bass


Hon. Cedric L. Richmond

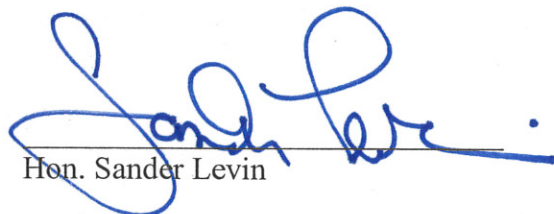

Hon. Suzanne Bonamici


Hon. Suzan K. DelBene


Hon. Donald M. Payne, Jr

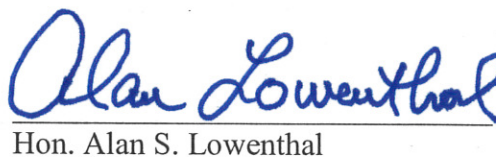

Hon. Dina Titus

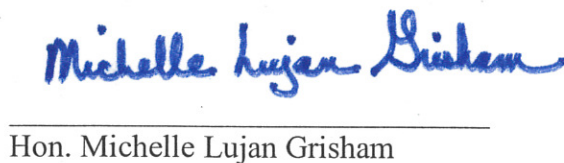

Hon. Joaquin Castro


Hon. Sander Levin

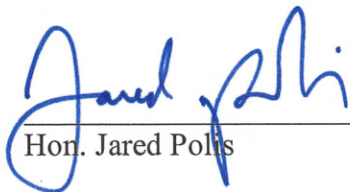

Hon. Joseph P. Kennedy, III


Hon. Daniel T. Kildee

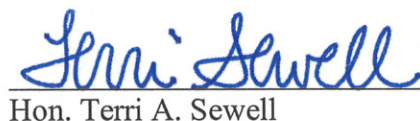

Hon. Alan S. Lowenthal


Hon. Michelle Lujan Grisham


Hon. Patrick E. Murphy


Hon. Jared Polis


Hon. Bill Foster


Hon. Terri A. Sewell


Hon. Ami Bera


Hon. Lois Frankel


Hon. Julia Brownley


Hon. Tony Cardenas


Hon. Grace Meng


Hon. Hakeem S. Jeffries

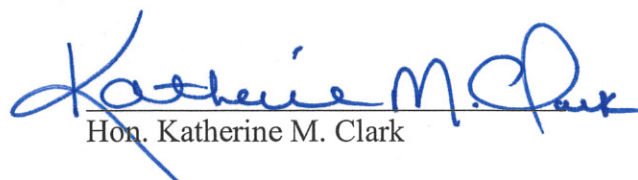

Hon. Beto O'Rourke

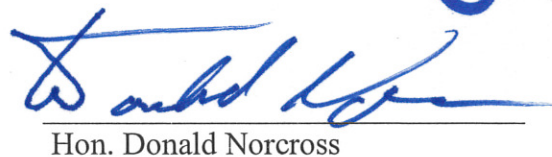

Hon. Scott H. Peters


Hon. Mark Takano


Hon. Juan Vargas


Hon. Robin L. Kelly


Hon. Katherine M. Clark


Hon. Donald Norcross


Hon. Pete Aguilar

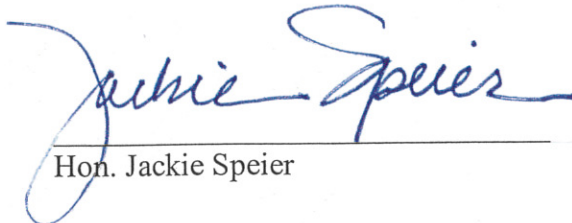

Hon. Ruben Gallego


Hon. John Sarbanes

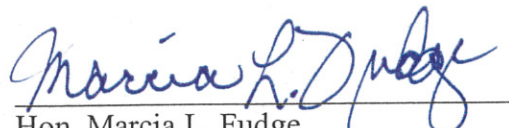

Hon. Marc A. Veasey

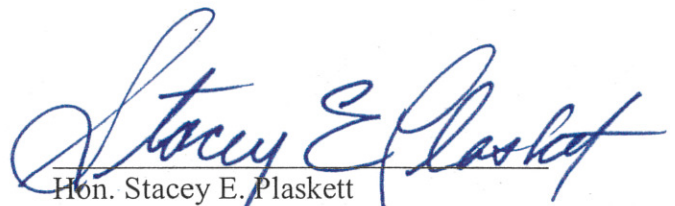

Hon. Matt Cartwright

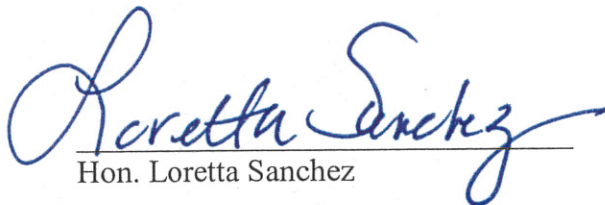

Hon. Sean Patrick Maloney

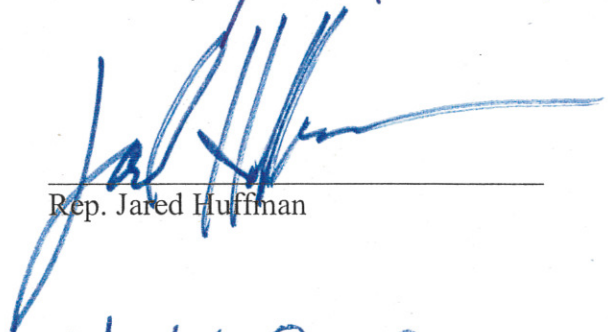

Hon. Jackie Speier

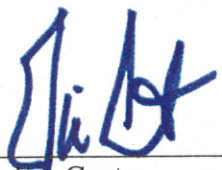

Hon. Kathleen M. Rice


Hon. Marcia L. Fudge

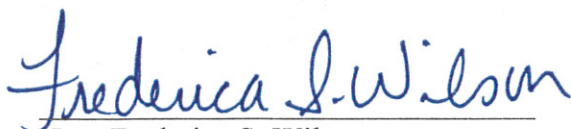

Hon. Stacey E. Plaskett

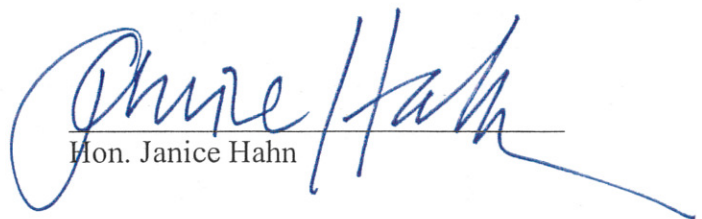

Hon. Loretta Sanchez

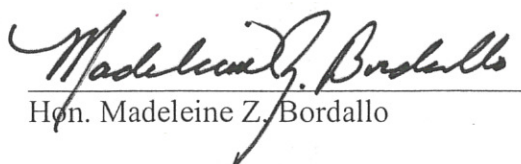

Rep. Jared Huffman

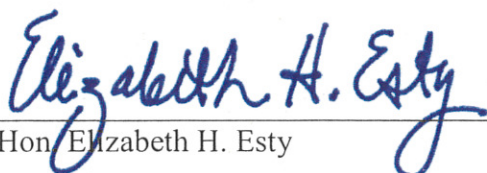

Hon. Jim Costa


Hon. Ann Kirkpatrick


Hon. Frederica S. Wilson


Hon. Janice Hahn


Hon. Madeleine Z. Bordallo


Hon. Elizabeth H. Esty

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a smaller 'K' and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hon. John K. Delaney