

WASHINGTON (21 January) - U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.), Ranking Member of the Homeland Security Committee's Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight today, sent a letter to Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano urging prompt action to enhance our nation's visa screening capabilities overseas to keep terrorists out of the United States.

In the letter, Bilirakis highlighted the need to expand the Visa Security Program, which places highly-trained security officers at overseas posts to thoroughly investigate and scrutinize visa applicants. Currently only 14 of the 220 Department of State posts around the world have Visa Security Units, while 40 have been identified as 'high priority'.

"I am greatly troubled that expansion of this vital terrorist screening program does not appear to be a priority of the Administration, especially since Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab reportedly received a visa in London, which does not have a Visa Security Unit," the letter said. "Although Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has a plan for deploying additional Visa Security Units in the coming years, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2010 budget request only included funding to continue visa security activities at existing high-risk locations, not expand these terrorist detection capabilities."

In June, Bilirakis sponsored an amendment to H.R. 2892, the Fiscal Year 2010 Homeland Security Appropriations Act, which shifted \$1.7 million from administrative functions at the Department to be used solely to open additional Visa Security Units. The House approved this amendment by a vote of 423 to 6 on June 24, 2009. Unfortunately, the final conference agreement on the bill only included \$500,000 for this purpose.

"The Visa Security Program is the nation's first-line of defense against those who want to gain visas to do us harm, and we should be aggressively examining visa applications to identify potential terrorists before they obtain a visa to the United States," said Bilirakis.

To read the letter in its entirety [click here](#) .