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October 17th, 2018
The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 290
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Graham:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Public Affairs Alliance of Iranian Americans (PAAIA), I am writing regarding your recent comments on the television show, *Fox and Friends*, about Iranian ancestry. While we are appreciative of your clarification about the comment, it is important for you to understand that your insensitive joke came across as bigoted and deeply offensive to the Iranian American community.

There are over a million Americans of Iranian descent who are extraordinarily loyal and proud American citizens. They contribute in a myriad of ways to the betterment of the United States: serving in our military and our intelligence community; as members of our police, FBI and first responders; in local, state and federal government; as teachers and researchers in our schools and universities; in leadership and pioneering roles in business, medicine, science and the arts.

As you are aware, Iranian Americans have also made significant contributions to the state of South Carolina. Your own constituents of Iranian descent are hard-working Americans who deserve your respect. If anything, they are a model immigrant community, many second and third generation, who should be singled out for praise, rather than casually pilloried.

Furthermore, from a foreign policy perspective, denigrating people of Iranian descent does not advance your own policy objectives of supporting the Iranian people and their democratic aspirations. The vast majority of the Iranian people are young, educated, digitally connected and hold a favorable disposition toward America. Distinguishing the Iranian people from the regime is important.

We hope that you will take the concerns of the Iranian American community seriously and in the future refrain from broad generalizations that are likely to mischaracterize an entire group of Americans and run counter to U.S. foreign policy objectives.

PAAIA appreciates your long-standing [support for immigrant rights](#) and [Comprehensive Immigration Reform](#). We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you in person to discuss ways in which we can work together to engage the Iranian American community and promote our shared interests with all Americans.

If you require further information, please feel free to have your office contact us. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Leila Austin
Executive Director