

September 10, 2012

Honorable Lamar Smith
Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Honorable John Conyers
Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Smith and Congressman Conyers,

We write to express our strong support for S. 3245, which the Senate passed by unanimous consent prior the August recess, and which is scheduled to be voted on by the House tomorrow. S. 3245 would extend four expiring immigration programs for a period of three years. The expiring programs that would be extended by the bill include the E-Verify, Conrad 30 J1 Visa Waiver, EB-5 Regional Centers, and the Special Immigrant Non-minister Religious Worker Visa Program.

Of particular interest to us is the Religious Worker Visa Program (RWVP). Unless Congress acts by September 30, 2012, the RWVP will expire, leaving our religious denominations and organizations with no way to bring in, where necessary, permanent religious workers to staff our religious institutions and attend the urgent needs of the communities we serve.

The Special Immigrant Non-Minister portion of the RWVP became law in 1990. Originally enacted with a sunset provision, it has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support in Congress and has been reauthorized six times since then. Under this important program, a maximum of 5,000 visas each year are available for religious workers employed by a broad range of religious denominations and organizations.

Religious communities that participate in the program have found these special visas vital to carrying out their work. Some religious workers provide critical services in areas including religious education and care for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, immigrants, refugees, the homeless and hungry, abused and neglected children, and families at risk. Others work in areas as diverse as performing missionary work, designing and building temples, producing religious publications, sustaining prison ministries, and training health care professionals to provide religiously appropriate health care.

Thank you for your leadership in ensuring the RWVP is extended so our institutions and communities can carry out our missions with the religious workers we need.

Sincerely,

Agudath Israel of America
American Jewish Committee
Brudershof Communities
Catholic Legal Immigration Network
Church of Scientology International
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
First Church of Christ, Scientist
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Hindu American Foundation
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jubilee Campaign
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
National Association of Evangelicals
Rabbinical Assembly
Union for Reform Judaism
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
World Relief