

Religious Organization Support for the Special Immigrant Non-Minister Religious Worker Visa Program

May 14, 2015

Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

We write to express our strong support for S. 1339, legislation which would extend permanently the Special Immigrant Non-Minister portion of the Religious Worker Visa Program (RWVP). Unless Congress acts by September 30, 2015, 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 Originally enacted with a sunset provision, it has enjoyed broad, bipartisan support in Congress and has been reauthorized seven times since then.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 throughout the United States that participate in the program have found these 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.

We request that you support immediate passage of this vital legislation. 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
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
Church of Scientology National Public Affairs Office
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
First Church of Christ, Scientist
HIAS
Hindu American Foundation
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jubilee Campaign USA
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
National Association of Evangelicals
Rabbinical Assembly
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
The Jewish Federations of North America
UJA-New York Federation
Union for Reform Judaism
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
World Relief

cc: Senator Charles Grassley, Chairman, Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Senator Patrick Leahy, Ranking Minority Member, Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Senator Orrin G. Hatch
Senator Benjamin L. Cardin