



Focus on Religious Freedom
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Congress Must Act to Protect Religious Workers

A major staffing crisis is looming for religious ministries throughout the United States, unless Congress passes and the President signs the bi-partisan Religious Workforce Protection Act to alleviate a major backlog in processing Religious Worker Visa applications.

Under current law, foreign born religious workers are permitted to live and work in the United States for up to five years through the nonimmigrant religious worker (R-1) visa. During that time, they may apply for and receive permanent residency.

However, over the last five years Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Tim Kaine (D-Virginia) have repeatedly raised concerns with the State Department and Department of Homeland Security about the increasing backlog in processing these applications, forcing foreign born religious workers to leave after five years, for at least a year.

That backlog, they point out, is “costing churches, mosques, synagogues, and other religious organizations the beloved religious workers on whom their congregations, and the local communities that they serve, have grown to depend.”

This is forcing departure of increasing numbers of Catholic priests, religious sisters and brothers, and others serving the Church throughout the United States, leaving parishes, hospitals, schools, and other ministries understaffed, and Catholics without access to sacraments and spiritual care.

The Religious Workforce Protection Act, sponsored by Sens. Collins, Kaine, and Jim Risch (R-Idaho), and a companion bill in the House of Representatives sponsored by Reps. Mike Carey (R-Ohio) and Richard Neal (D-Massachusetts), would empower the Department of Homeland Security to extend temporary R-1 nonimmigrant status for religious workers past five years, so they can remain in the country pending a decision on their permanent resident application.

The legislation is supported by religious leaders across a wide range of faith communities, including Catholic, Jewish, Evangelical, Episcopal, Muslim, and Hindu.

Please urge your U.S. Senators and Congressional Representative to support H.R. 2672 / S. 1298, the Religious Workforce Protection Act.

Read more: <https://www.collins.senate.gov/newsroom/senators-collins-kaine-risch-introduce-religious-workforce-protection-act> <https://www.votervoice.net/USCCB/Campaigns/125641/Respond>