



September 30, 2009

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye
Chairman - U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S 128
The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Inouye,

On behalf of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (AAPI), I write to express our support for Section 571 of the Senate-passed version of H.R. 2892, the Fiscal Year 2010 Homeland Security Appropriations Act.

As you know, this section was added to H.R. 2892 on the Senate floor by Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Bill Nelson (D-FL), John Cornyn (R-TX), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Robert Bennett (R-UT), Harry Reid (D-NV), Charles Schumer (D-NY), Edward Kennedy (D-MA), and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and it was agreed to by unanimous consent. It would extend two expiring provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act and enact into law a mechanism for providing immigration relief for widows and orphans of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. As these issues greatly impact the Indian American community, AAPI urges the conferees deliberating H.R. 2892 to include this important section in the final conference report.

Section 571 of the Senate-passed version of H.R. 2892 would:

- Extend authorization for the Special Immigrant Non-Minister portion of the Religious Worker Visa Program (RWVP) for a period of three years and direct DHS to continue to build on its success in ensuring that the program is properly used. Unless Section 571 is included in the final version of H.R. 2892, this provision of the RWVP will expire on September 30, 2009. The RWVP permits a maximum of 5,000 international religious workers to enter the U.S. to perform a variety of tasks that assist the sponsoring religious denomination and also the broader community. These workers teach in religious schools, design and build temples, staff soup kitchens, homeless shelters and community centers, and perform numerous other religious functions. The DHS Office of the Inspector General reported in June 2009 that a comprehensive regulatory overhaul in 2008, combined with broad use of site visits and centralized adjudication of applications have contributed to integrity and security in the program.

AAPI fully supports this provision as many faiths are represented in the Indian American community, and this provision allows religious workers from India to effectively serve our communities here in the U.S.

- Extend for three years the Conrad 30 Program, which allows International Medical Graduates (IMGs) here on J-1 visas to work in underserved or rural areas where there is a shortage of medical professionals. In exchange for staying in the U.S. and practicing in these areas for three years, the Conrad 30 program waives the two-year requirement for these physicians to return to their home country. This vital program has brought over 8,500 doctors to such areas in all 50 states. Unless Section 571 is included in the final version of H.R. 2892, this program will expire on September 30, 2009. The Conrad 30/J-1 visa waiver program has enabled physicians from India to provide quality health care to thousands of patients who otherwise may not have received this level of care. AAPI strongly supports extending this program for three years.
- Allow surviving spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens to remain after the U.S. citizen spouse dies by allowing them to seek permanent resident status under existing quotas. Section 571 would end what has become known as the “widow penalty” whereby legal spouses of U.S. citizens face automatic denial and deportation when their American spouse dies during bureaucratic immigration processing backlogs. The provision also allows the DHS Secretary humanitarian discretion to approve petitions that were already filed for certain relatives before the death of the petitioner if the relative continues to reside in the U.S., unless it would not be in the public interest. For the sake of fairness to legal immigrants who have followed our immigration laws and through no fault of their own, find their immigration status in question, this provision provides a commonsense and compassionate solution to a difficult and traumatic family situation. AAPI fully supports this provision.

Section 571 of the Senate-passed version of H.R. 2892 was included in the measure by the full Senate as a result of a bipartisan effort and has widespread support in our organization. In its 28th year, AAPI is the largest ethnic medical association in the U.S. with over 15,000 members. On behalf of the American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin and the nearly three million Indian Americans in the U.S., I strongly urge you to support all three provisions contained in Section 571 and ensure that they are included in the final version of H.R. 2892.

Thank you once again for your support of AAPI.

Sincerely,



Dr. Vinod K. Shah
AAPI President