

September 2, 2009

The Honorable David Price, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Byrd, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: H.R. 2892 Homeland Security Appropriations for FY2010

Dear Conferees:

We, the undersigned organizations, 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 was agreed to by unanimous consent. It would extend, without change, 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. We urge conferees deliberating on H.R. 2892 to include this important section in the final conference agreement.

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 no more than 5,000 foreign-born religious workers to enter the United States to perform a variety of tasks that assist not just the sponsoring religious denomination but 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.
- Extend for three years the Conrad 30 Program, which allows foreign doctors already in the United States who have received medical training in the U.S. to extend their stay in the country if they agree to practice in medically underserved communities for three years. The program has brought over 8,500 doctors to underserved 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.
- 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.

Section 571 of 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 throughout the country. We strongly urge you to support this important provision and ensure that it is included in the final version of H.R. 2892.

Sincerely,

Agudath Israel of America
American Asian Justice Center
American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American Jewish Committee
B'nai B'rith International
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)
Church Communities International
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Church of Scientology International
Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
The Episcopal Church
The First Church of Christ, Scientist
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Hindu American Foundation
Indian American Republican Council
Irish Apostolate USA
Jubilee Campaign USA
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Association of Evangelicals
National Council of Jewish Women
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
The National Immigration Forum
3RNet - National Rural Recruitment and Retention Network
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
OCA: Embracing the hopes and aspirations of Asian Pacific Americans
Rabbinical Assembly
Sojourners
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
USAsian
World Relief
The Xaverian Brothers