



April 10, 2025

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to express our strong support for the Religious Workforce Protection Act (RWPA) (S. 1298/H.R. 2672), which was recently introduced on a bipartisan basis. We urge you to join with your colleagues in cosponsoring this vital measure and to work toward its immediate passage, thereby furthering the free exercise of religion in our country for the benefit of all Americans.

The RWPA is desperately needed to ensure communities across our nation can continue to enjoy the essential contributions of foreign-born religious workers who lawfully entered the United States on a nonimmigrant religious worker (R-1) visa. Numbered among them are many Catholic priests, as well as religious sisters and brothers. Unfortunately, a significant backlog in the employment-based, fourth preference (EB-4) visa category depended upon by these workers for permanent status in the United States threatens to disrupt the services they provide to Americans of many different faiths, as well as those of no faith at all.

Relying on precedent in existing law, this simple, targeted measure would provide relief to workers and their employers who are confronted by this situation without increasing the number of people permitted to immigrate to the United States. Under the RWPA, those already in the United States on an R-1 visa (normally capped at five years) who have applied for adjustment of status would be able to remain in the country in their current nonimmigrant status for renewable, three-year periods until they are able to receive a green card. This would allow them to continue serving American communities without interruption.

In the absence of this relief, R-1 visa holders awaiting adjustment are forced to depart the country and abandon their ministries. Moreover, under existing regulations, those faced with this situation cannot return on a subsequent R-1 visa for at least one year,¹ creating significant hardship for the workers, their employers, and the people they serve. Unfortunately, this has already occurred in far too many cases, having an impact on Catholics and non-Catholics alike.² The RWPA would apply retroactively to individuals who were forced to depart the United States prior to its enactment and remain subject to the one-year requirement. Additionally, this bill would extend the same

¹ 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(r)(15).

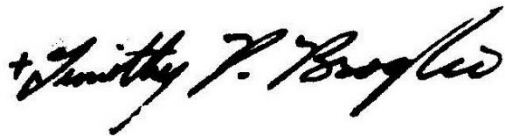
² See, e.g., Katie Zakrzewski, *US Changes to Religious Worker Visas Could Affect Priests Ministering in Arkansas, Other Dioceses*, OSV News (Oct. 24, 2024), <https://www.osvnews.com/us-changes-to-religious-worker-visas-could-affect-priests-ministering-in-arkansas-other-dioceses/>; Wendy Strong, *Due to Green Card Backlog, Archdiocese of Milwaukee at Risk of Losing 24 Internationally-Born Priests*, SPECTRUM NEWS 1 (Nov. 14, 2024), <https://spectrumnews1.com/wi/milwaukee/news/2024/11/07/green-card-processing-backlog-archdiocese-of-milwaukee>; Lauren Anderson-Cripps, *Visa Backlog Imperils Immigrant Priests' Status*, THE LIVING CHURCH (Feb. 28, 2025), <https://livingchurch.org/news/news-episcopal-church/visa-backlog-imperils-immigrant-priests-status/>.

flexibility to religious workers that is already available to other employment-based immigrants for them to change jobs within their religious tradition while their adjustment of status is pending.

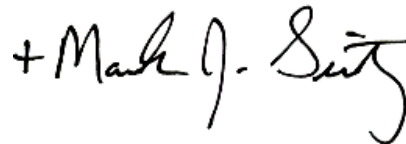
Beneficiaries of the Religious Worker Visa Program provide a range of services and play a pivotal role in advancing the religious exercise of everyday Americans. In the Catholic context, these workers include priests, men and women in religious orders and congregations, and other laypersons serving in a wide range of ministries. Some parishes, especially those in rural or isolated areas, would go without regular access to the sacraments, if not for these religious workers. Additionally, dioceses with large immigrant populations rely on foreign-born religious workers for their linguistic and cultural expertise. We would not be able to serve our diverse flocks, which reflect the rich tapestry of our society overall, without the faithful men and women who come to serve through the Religious Worker Visa Program. Simply put, an increasing number of American families will be unable to practice the basic tenets of their faith if this situation is not addressed soon. Likewise, hospitals will go without chaplains, schools will go without teachers, and seminaries will go without instructors.

We are deeply grateful to and commend the original cosponsors of this bill—Senator Susan Collins, Senator Tim Kaine, Senator James Risch, Representative Mike Carey, Representative Richard Neal, Representative Maria Salazar, and Representative Pete Stauber—for their steadfast leadership in addressing this nationwide challenge. We now ask for you to join them in supporting the RWPA and passing this much needed source of relief.

Respectfully,



Most Reverend Timothy P. Broglio
Archbishop for the Military Services, USA
President, USCCB



Most Reverend Mark J. Seitz
Bishop of El Paso
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration