

June 28, 2013

## Senate Passes Critical Protections to Prevent Recruitment Abuse

Yesterday June 27, 2013, the U.S. Senate cast the final vote to pass immigration reform legislation with a bipartisan majority of 68-32. The immigration reform bill includes important anti-trafficking protections that will prevent the exploitation of internationally recruited workers. The International Labor Recruitment Working Group (ILRWG) was instrumental in ensuring that these provisions were included in the bill.

The bill approved yesterday by a large bipartisan majority is a significant step in addressing the systemic abuse of international workers who are recruited to the United States. It will prohibit recruiters from charging workers fees—a critical component to prevent economic coercion and debt bondage. The bill also ensures that workers receive information about the terms and conditions of their employment before they leave their home countries. Equally important, the Senate bill will create a publicly available recruiter registry to increase transparency in the recruitment process.

This is not a perfect bill. Significant compromises had to be made in the process. An onerous amendment was added late last week that will have devastating consequences on border communities. Although a complete carve out for all J-1 visa holders from the anti-trafficking provisions was desired by some powerful lobbying groups, tremendous efforts by the ILRWG advocacy committee prevented this carve out. Instead a new subtitle was added to the bill that provides J-1 visa holders with some protections. J-1 visa holders will receive information on the terms and conditions of employment before they leave their home countries, will have protection from retaliation and will have the possibility of immigration relief for reporting recruitment abuse. The Department of State will cap the maximum amount of fees that can be charged to J-1 visa holders.

Yesterday's vote is historic. But there is still much work to do to end the exploitation of internationally recruited workers. The ILRWG will continue working to address the systemic abuse across visa categories and to ensure that these critical anti-trafficking provisions are signed into law.