

May 4, 2017

**PROPOSED STATE-BASED WORK VISA PROGRAM WOULD RESULT IN DEBT  
BONDAGE FOR IMMIGRANT WORKERS**

*Yesterday, Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) introduced the State Sponsored Visa Pilot Program Act of 2017, a bill to give states control over aspects of the flawed existing guestworker programs. The International Labor Recruitment Working Group – a strategic alliance of organizations across labor sectors that works alongside internationally recruited workers, analyzes labor markets and economic conditions, and advocates for the rights of all working people in this country – issued the following statement in response:*

“The proposed legislation is bad for workers and fails to correct flaws with the existing work visa programs. Under this dangerous and unworkable plan, states could charge internationally recruited workers fees for the opportunity to work. Workers would face restrictions on movement and would remain vulnerable to abuses due to their indebtedness. This legislation, if enacted, would speed the race to the bottom that enables employers to lower wages and working conditions for both internationally recruited and U.S. workers.

“The bill would allow states to charge workers a bond upon entry, adding to workers’ upfront costs such as recruitment fees and travel expenses. Recruitment costs often result in debt bondage for migrant workers who are forced to choose between returning home to insurmountable debts and remaining in abusive labor conditions. The legislation also contains harmful restrictions that limit workers’ freedom to take a job in another state and penalize them for doing so. While the bill would create temporary status for some undocumented immigrants who qualify for the program, applicants would be charged a penalty based on their prior unlawful presence.

“The proposed legislation fails to address the abuses in the current work visa system and runs the risk of indenturing workers to states. Rather than creating additional fees and restrictions for internationally recruited workers, Congress should eliminate recruitment fees and other forms of pre-employment debt, provide freedom of movement between states and employers, create transparency in recruitment, and remove barriers to accessing justice. The Working Group calls for a system that protects internationally recruited workers, unites families, provides a path to citizenship, and improves labor standards for all workers in the United States.”

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The International Labor Recruitment Working Group is a coalition of labor, migration, civil rights, and anti-trafficking organizations and academics seeking to reform international labor recruitment across visa categories and industry sectors. [www.fairlaborrecruitment.org](http://www.fairlaborrecruitment.org).