

August 19, 2024

Director Neera Tanden
Domestic Policy Council
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20016

Director Ur Jaddou
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
20 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Reduction of Work Permit Backlog and Continuation of Efforts to Expand Access to Work Authorization

Dear Secretary Mayorkas, Director Tanden, and Director Jaddou,

The undersigned 101 state, national, and local faith-based organizations, write to call on your administration to urgently address backlogs in work permit processing and continue efforts to enhance, expand, and extend access to work authorization for immigrants and asylum seekers alike. Lastly, we ask that you codify the automatic extension for renewal applications and extend the automatic extension period to 730 days as a means to protect the ability of individuals to work for years to come.

The ability to work is a gateway to the most essential needs we have as human beings, including food, shelter, clothing, access to healthcare, and the ability to care for our loved ones and participate in our communities. The call to work is widely recognized across many faith traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, Deuteronomy 14:28-29 emphasizes that the Lord blesses our work so that we may share its fruits with others. Work is essential for ensuring that basic necessities of life are met and for the broader goal of creating a more just world. The dignity of work and the theology of vocation—the belief that we find our purpose where our passions and the needs of the world intersect—are important concepts found throughout Christian and Jewish faiths. For the Muslim faith, the dignity of labor and the importance of providing opportunities for all, especially those of low income, is paramount. The Quran emphasizes justice and equitable distribution of resources, stating, “And do not forget your share of the world” (Quran 28:77). Facilitating employment not only alleviates poverty but also fosters a more just and compassionate society, in line with the principles of Islam.

The value of work extends to all people, including immigrants and asylum seekers. Immigrants and asylum seekers often face systemic barriers to meet their basic needs to support themselves and their families. One such barrier is the current backlog in applications for certain Employment Authorization Documents (EADs), and extensive and uncertain processing times at USCIS, resulting in months or years-long waits for work authorization. We have watched with deep concern as many longstanding members of our congregations, churches, parishes, synagogues, mosques and communities struggle to provide for themselves and their families or lose their jobs, healthcare, or housing due to work permit processing delays. We share their desperation as the [work permit backlog worsens](#), with many fearing

indefinite insecurity if their applications are not decided prior to the end of the calendar year. We also note that with the uncertainty comes increased precarity and vulnerability to exploitation and even wage theft and human trafficking, for those who are forced to work in the informal economy as a result.

We are thankful for the [new funding](#) from Congress specifically for work permit processing. **We urge you to actively work to utilize this funding so that members of our faith communities may obtain work authorization and a better chance for stability.** We note with appreciation USCIS's recent track record of effectively reducing backlogs and processing times when provided with additional resources/funding, especially the 2023 efforts to streamline refugee entrant work authorization processing. To this end, **we strongly encourage USCIS to take additional steps to identify the root causes for the backlogs that currently exist while also working with interagency partners to take forward-looking steps to ensure another backlog is not created.** This is a personal issue for many in our community as people caught in the work permit backlog frequently have deep ties in our communities. They include people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS), professionals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), survivors of domestic violence and gender-based violence, asylum seekers, and individuals eligible for resident status.

We further request you codify and guarantee the automatic extension currently afforded in a [temporary rule](#) with a 730 day automatic extension period so all renewal applicants can maintain their livelihood. Alarming, 260,000 people are estimated to lose work authorization even under the temporary rule. Expanding the length of the extension to 730 days and making it a guarantee for years to come for renewal applicants would be profoundly meaningful for these individuals and their families. Many have contributed extensive talents and grace to our neighborhoods and faith communities or are eager to contribute after a long journey to seek safety. Without your prompt intervention, however, these individuals could languish in the current backlog or see their lives upended because their work authorizations expire prematurely.

Across our diverse faith traditions, we are called to welcome the sojourner and act in solidarity with those on the margins. We know such a response is supported by the values, laws, and ideals that this country holds dear. We respectfully call on the Biden administration to consider these recommendations so we can continue to support newcomers and immigrants with deep roots in our communities in their pursuit of safety and dignity.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. Please reach out to Ashley Feasley, ashley.feasley@globalrefuge.org, Giovana Oaxaca, Giovana.Oaxaca@elca.org, Guillermo Torres gtorres@cluejustice.org, and Joshua Utter, joshua.utter@jrsusa.org, for further questions or follow up.

Sincerely,

cc: Melissa Rogers, White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships; Rebecca Sternhell, Office of DHS Office of Partnership and Engagement; Nicole Wood, DHS Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

National & International

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Bethany Christian Services

Catholic Charities USA

Church World Service

Community for Children

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Del Camino Jesuit Border Ministries

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

First Church of God

Franciscan Action Network

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Gather Consulting

Global Refuge

Greater Northwest Area, The United Methodist Church

Hawaii District of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church

Immigration Law & Justice Network

Islamic Relief USA

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA

Jewish Women International

Johnson Family Foundation

Justice and Advocacy Ministries at Disciples Home Missions

Kino Border Initiative

Lincoln Park Presbyterian Church

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Mormon Women for Ethical Government

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Farm Worker Ministry

Pacific Presbytery

Park Avenue Congregational Church Arlington, MA
Postcolonial Roundtable
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Presbytery of San Francisco
Ravensworth Baptist Church National Farm Worker Ministry Partner
Saint Mark United Methodist Church LA
School Sisters of Notre Dame, Central Pacific Province
Shepherd of the Hills United Church of Christ
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
Srs. of St. Francis of Philadelphia
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
The Episcopal Church
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Refugee & Immigrant Services & Education
Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ
World Relief

State & Local

Austin Region Justice for Our Neighbors
AVAN Immigrant Services
BILJC (Border Immigration Law and Justice Center)
Brea Congregational United Church of Christ
Cedar Hills United Church of Christ
Central Pacific Conference of the United Church of Christ
Christian Council of Delmarva
Church Women United in Illinois
Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice
Comunidad Sol
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington DC
Echo Park Immigration Center

Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles
Estrella del Paso (Formerly Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services Inc)
Faith Action Network
Farm Worker Ministry Northwest
First Congregational UCC
First Lutheran Church, Fullerton, CA
Frederick District of the Baltimore Washington Conference, The United Methodist Church
Hope Border Institute
Immigrant Allies of Marshalltown
Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
Iowa Unitarian Universalist Witness/Advocacy Network Network
Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice
JUJustice Washington
Leo Baeck Temple
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA)
Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest
Orange County Equality Coalition
Parkside Community Church UCC
Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Carlsbad CA
Presbytery of the Pacific, PCUSA
Promise Arizona
Rev. Dr. Lawrence Boudon
San Pedro United Methodist Church
Sisters of St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity, Holy Name Province
St. Andrew's Evangelical Lutheran Church of West Los Angeles
St. Paul's United Church of Christ
The Row LA- The Church Without Walls
UE Local 1008
Undefended Dharma
Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois

Unitarian Universalist FaithAction New Jersey

Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry of North Carolina

University of San Francisco Immigration & Deportation Defense Clinic

UU Mass Action

Virginia Unitarian Universal State Action Network

Wellspring United Church of Christ

Wesley Theological Seminary

Wesley United Methodist Church of Honolulu

Wisconsin Conference United Church of Christ

Wisconsin UU State Action Network