

Justice in Motion

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, DC U.S. Senators Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and Ted Cruz (R-TX) and U.S. Representatives Lois Frankel (D-FL) and Ted Deutch (D-FL) today introduced the bipartisan Visa Transparency Anti-Trafficking Act. The bill seeks to prevent human trafficking by bringing more openness to the foreign temporary worker visa process.

Millions of foreign individuals are authorized to work in the United States every year on temporary, non-immigrant visas. Abusive employers are bringing foreign workers to the United States with the expectation of legitimate jobs, only to coerce them into unbearable conditions, including sex slavery and domestic servitude. Federal data on these temporary work visas is not uniformly reported and not available to the public, impeding law enforcements efforts to crack down on this form of human trafficking. The Visa Transparency Anti-Trafficking Act provides a straightforward solution to gaps in reporting, by requiring a standardized reporting system, expanding reports to include critical information, and providing governments, advocates, and the public with the data needed to develop trafficking prevention programs.

Inadequate data and lax enforcement help enable widespread human trafficking. By requiring the reporting of key data about non-immigrant visa categories that permit employment, our bipartisan measure will close major gaps in public government data. We will strengthen law enforcements ability to stop this horrific modern day slavery by doing everything possible to shine a light on predatory recruiters and complicit employers.

Human trafficking is a stain on our society forcing too many workers into sex trade and abusive labor practices, said **Frankel**. Our bill will help end this modern-day slavery by increasing transparency and providing worker protection organizations and law enforcement the information to identify and stop it.

Human trafficking is a terrible and tragic industry, affecting every community across the country, **Cruz** said. It is an act of unmitigated evil that tears down the rights of its victims and forces them into modern-day slavery. Unfortunately, human trafficking is far more common in the United States than most people think. Its a scourge on our country and the world, and it needs to be stopped. Im proud to introduce this bill alongside Senator Blumenthal, to expose human trafficking abuses that occur in our nonimmigrant visa system by creating a better reporting system and sharing data so that abuse patterns can be identified and stopped. Transparency will empower law enforcement and vigilant communities to identify potential victims and rescue them from predatory employers. It is time for Congress to pass this bill, hold offenders accountable, and bring justice to their victims.

We must do more to close the gaps in our immigration system that allow human traffickers to operate their networks right under our

noses. Our federal agencies already collect data on these nonimmigrant visa programs. Making the data public could assist policymakers and advocacy groups to develop ways to fill gaps and protect workers trafficked into our country under false pretenses, said **Deutch**.

In the Senate, the legislation is co-sponsored by U.S. Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT). In the House, the legislation is co-sponsored by U.S. Representatives Randy Weber (R-TX), Jim Himes (D-CT), Ann Wagner (R-MO), and David Schweikert (R-AZ).

The Visa Transparency Anti-Trafficking Act is also supported by AFL-CIO, Alliance to End Slavery & Trafficking (ATEST), American Federation of Teachers, Centro de los Derechos del Migrante, Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST), Economic Policy Institute, Freedom Network, Free the Slaves, Futures Without Violence, International Labor Recruitment Working Group (ILRWG), Justice in Motion, National Domestic Workers Alliance, National Employment Law Project, National Guestworker Alliance, Polaris, Safe Horizon, Service Employee International Union (SEIU), Southern Poverty Law Center, UniteHERE, Verit, and Vital Voices.

When someone with a work visa travels to our country thinking a legitimate job awaits but then ends up in severe exploitation, something is terribly wrong with our system", said **Justice in Motion Executive Director, Cathleen Caron**. This bill will help us stop human trafficking by informing us who the employers are, providing key workforce demographics like where the workers are from, and the terms and conditions of those jobs. The government already has all the data, we are not asking it to collect more. We just want access to what it has.

I came to the United States through an Indonesian recruitment agency who promised me six months of employment at a hotel in Chicago. After I paid a \$3,000 recruitment fee, they obtained the paperwork to get me a temporary work visa. When I arrived in the United States, I didn't work in the hotel as promised. Instead, I was kidnapped, my passport was taken, and I was forced at gunpoint to be a sex slave in New York, Connecticut, and the surrounding areas. My traffickers demanded that I pay \$30,000 to be free. Finally, I escaped from the brothel by jumping out of a second-story bathroom window, said **Shandra Woworuntu, a survivor of human trafficking and founder of Mentari**. I believe intervention without prevention in the fight to eradicate human trafficking and exploitation is not a complete solution. We need more transparency and better data about workers who come to the United States, and the Visa Transparency Anti Trafficking Act of 2019 will be an important step in preventing temporary workers who come to the U.S. from being exploited and trafficked like I was.

Despite the importance of migrant workers in the U.S. economy, it is extremely difficult to uncover basic facts about work visa programs that would help ensure they are treated fairly, said **EPI Director of Immigration Law and Policy Research Daniel Costa**. But we know that the migrant workers in these programs are often exploited by their employers, thanks to numerous exposes and reports in the media and from government auditors.

Nearly half of the labor trafficking survivors reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in cases when immigration status was disclosed were foreign nationals trafficked while here through the U.S. temporary work visa system. Yet, our own government's data on these programs are shrouded in secrecy," said **Bradley Myles, CEO of Polaris**. "The Visa Transparency Anti-Trafficking Act is essential to the fight against human trafficking and would help provide the necessary data, records, and information we need to better understand how guestworkers are being exploited in America. Our government has this information, and we hope Congress passes this bill requiring it to be made public."

The Visa Transparency Anti-Trafficking Act would:

Create a standardized reporting system across all non-immigrant visas that authorize work, and require that the reported information be made public;

Mandate that critical information be included in the public report in order to help advocacy groups and the public identify signs that a foreign workforce is demographically distinct from its domestic counterpart which may indicate an underlying problem, such as employment discrimination, or worse, human trafficking; and,

Give governments, advocates, and the public the data needed to develop targeted trafficking prevention outreach programs to educate workers domestically and abroad.

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