

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 23, 2024

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By ESEC at 10:19 am, Jan 24, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Rena Bitter
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20036

The Honorable Ur Jaddou
Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Camp Springs, MD 20588

Dear Secretary Blinken, Secretary Mayorkas, Assistant Secretary Bitter, and Director Jaddou:

We write to follow up on our October 25, 2023, letter regarding the increased hardships faced by religious organizations, their employees, and the communities they serve due to the change in statutory interpretation made last year by the U.S. Department of State. As you know, that change has lengthened the amount of time it will take for all applicants from most countries to receive an employment-based, fourth preference (EB-4) visa. We appreciate the Department of State's December 2023 response, including its commitment to "expeditiously process nonimmigrant religious worker visa applications and current EB-4 immigrant visas at consular sections overseas."

As we acknowledged in our initial letter, we recognize that Congress has an important role to play with respect to improving our nation's immigration system. However, we reiterate our request that you give more consideration to ways in which administrative, non-statutory changes may be appropriate to reduce the burdens on religious employers and workers—including by considering, to the extent permitted by law, the administrative actions recommended to you in the May 25, 2023, letter sent to you by a coalition of religious organizations. We are also interested in the specific actions that the Department of State is taking to fulfill its commitment to "expeditiously process" visas at consular sections overseas, and we look forward to receiving a prompt response from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security relating to the issues within its jurisdiction.

Again, thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services

March 6, 2024

The Honorable Susan M. Collins
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Collins:

Thank you for your January 24, 2024 letter to the Department of Homeland Security following up on your October 25, 2023, letter regarding nonimmigrant and immigrant visas for religious workers. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) appreciates the concerns you shared and your interest in assisting religious organizations and the communities they serve. USCIS continues to consider a variety of policy and regulatory options that may help ease some of the challenges faced by noncitizens with lengthy wait times for available EB-4 visas, including religious workers present in the United States in nonimmigrant R-1 status.

While USCIS may be able to provide some additional flexibility for prospective applicants, only legislation could fully address the concerns you raise. We defer to the Department of State regarding your question about actions they are taking to expeditiously process visas at consular sections overseas.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Senator Kaine, the cosigner of your letter, will receive a separate, identical response. For any additional assistance, please have your staff contact the USCIS Office of Legislative Affairs at (240) 721-3801.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ur M. Jaddou".

Ur M. Jaddou
Director