



# SAIPAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

P.O. Box 500806 Saipan, MP 96950 • Tel: (670) 234-7150 • Fax: (670) 234-7151  
www.saipanchamber.com info@saipanchamber.com

2017  
Board of Directors

President  
Velma Palacios

Vice President  
Ron Smith

Secretary  
Kevin McCale

Treasurer  
Michael Johnson

Directors  
Perry Inos Jr.  
Tyrell Pauling  
Donna Krum  
Alex Youn  
Alex Sablan

Executive Director  
Jill M. Arenovski

Administrator  
Merclynn K. Palec

Coordinator  
Christine S. Tadeo

March 7, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

We are writing to you as the collective voice of the business community on Saipan. Our Chamber comprises more than 160 private businesses, government agencies and nonprofit organizations. As our island is small and remote, our Chamber takes great measures to work with our whole community as we are interdependent upon each other. Our workforce issues not only affect our business ventures, but our entire economy.

We support the legislation proposed in S. 2325 and H.R. 4869 (Northern Mariana Islands U.S. Workforce Act). With this in mind, we respectfully request that applications over the current limit of 4,999 set for FY 2019 be held rather than returned, pending the outcome of the bill. Our economy depends on a stable and strong workforce. Wages are rising, and training continues to be provided to U.S. qualified workers. Our businesses need both foreign and local labor forces to survive.

We humbly ask for your consideration, and very much appreciate your effort and attention to our workforce issues.

Regards,

Velma M. Palacios, Chamber Board President

2018 MAR - 8 AM 9:50  
SCANNED/RECEIVED  
BY EXEC SEC



**U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services**

June 11, 2018

Ms. Velma M. Palacios  
President  
Saipan Chamber of Commerce  
P.O. Box 500806  
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Ms. Palacios:

Thank you for your March 7, 2018 letter. Secretary Nielsen asked that I respond on her behalf.

In your letter, you affirmed your support of the legislation proposed in S. 2325 and H.R. 4869, and you requested that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) hold all petitions it receives over the current Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Transitional Worker (CW-1) cap of 4,999 visas for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, instead of rejecting them, pending the outcome of this legislation.

USCIS appreciates the urgency of your concerns. On March 20, 2018, USCIS posted a website announcement that on April 2, 2018, the agency would begin accepting petitions under the CW-1 program subject to the FY 2019 cap of 4,999. The announcement stated that if more petitions were received on or before April 13, 2018 than the number of CW-1 visas available for FY 2019, then USCIS would conduct a lottery to determine which properly filed petitions would be accepted. Because the CW-1 cap was reached within this time period, the petitions received were subject to a lottery that was conducted on April 15, 2018. The petitions not selected in the lottery or received after the cap was reached are being rejected and the associated filing fees returned. Regarding your request for USCIS to hold these petitions based upon the possibility of new legislation, USCIS believes it is preferable to provide clarity to CNMI employers regarding the status of their petitions under current law, by timely informing them if their petitions were not selected in the lottery or were received after the cap was reached and returning filing fees.

The Department of Homeland Security and USCIS will follow the progress of the legislation that may overhaul the CW-1 program and extend it beyond 2019. USCIS legal and policy representatives provided requested technical assistance on the legislative language in S. 2325, the Northern Mariana Islands U. S. Workforce Act, prior to that bill being passed by the Senate on April 23, 2018.

Ms. Velma M. Palacios

Page 2

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Francis Cissna". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent "L" and "C".

L. Francis Cissna  
Director