

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 7, 2019

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

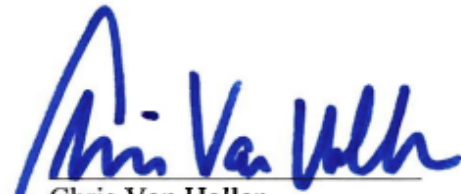
We have spoken numerous times in the past regarding the unpredictability of the guest worker visa system and the need for reform that meets the needs of American businesses and provides the necessary protections for workers employed in the United States for temporary work. While Congress debates comprehensive immigration reform that will provide a long-term solution for a range of immigration issues, we urge you to use the authority granted to you by Congress to meet the workforce needs of American businesses.


The lack of stability and certainty within the H-2B program has been detrimental to Maryland businesses. Maryland seafood industries have even seen an approximate 70% decrease in earnings due to the insecure labor market and lack of H-2B visas to fill those roles in remote areas. Many of these businesses have been in Maryland for generations and have relied on these short-term workers to keep up with market demands. Unfortunately, some Maryland businesses have already reduced the size of their American workforce due to the lack of availability of H-2B visas.

Furthermore, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2019 grants you the authority to grant additional H-2B visas "upon determining that the needs of American businesses cannot be satisfied in Fiscal Year 2019 with United States workers who are willing, qualified and able to perform temporary non-agricultural labor." Small business owners in Maryland have been forced to reduce or cancel contracts and are unable to properly plan or sustain their businesses. We urge you to take immediate action and release a sufficient number of additional visas.

Your attention to this issue will ensure that Maryland businesses can operate successfully this year and retain their American workforce.

Sincerely,


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senate


Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senate