

What's the Situation with Asylum Seekers & Work Authorization?

Asylum seekers flee their country to escape persecution, violence and other crises. Once in the US, they, through their immigration lawyer, file an application for asylum and after 150 days, they, through their lawyer, can apply for work authorization. This governmental document giving permission to work, the work authorization, will not arrive before 180 days. In fact, the wait can take months or even longer.

So, how does this affect asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers want to work. They come to the United States with skills, with experience in different types of work, with having been educated & employed. Many asylum seekers are sponsored by family members, friends, houses of faith, who are supporting them emotionally and financially. Many asylum seekers are in shelters and are supported by the town, state, non-profits and government. If asylum seekers could get their work authorization faster, they would be able to get a job, earn a living and be independent.

What kind of change could happen?

The Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Adjustment Act can change that. Introduced by House of Representative Chellie Pingree of Maine, HR 1325 shortens the wait to apply for work authorization to 30 days, instead of 150 days. This would mean asylum seekers could work and be more independent more quickly. More information can be found at: <https://pingree.house.gov/legislation/asylum-seeker-work-authorization-act.htm>,

Do we really need more workers in the US?

According to the US Chamber of Congress, report in August 2023 & February 13, 2024: "New Hampshire has 28 available workers for every 100 open jobs. New Hampshire is heavily grappling with a severe workforce shortage."

"Massachusetts has 42 available workers for every 100 open jobs."

Both states are in a "most severe" shortage worker index, according to the US Chamber of Commerce.

The US Chamber of Congress report adds: In the U.S., immigrants tend to be of working age in comparison to native-born individuals. As workers, these immigrants are also contributing to support programs like Medicare and Social Security.

Looking at New Hampshire in particular, immigrants comprise 6.4% of the state's population, totaling 87,055 individuals. Their collective spending power amounts to one billion dollars, while their tax contributions reach \$3.1 billion.”

Asylum seekers being able to work more quickly would help our economy and help local businesses as they face workforce shortages.

Are there proponents of this legislative measure?

There are a wide variety of proponents of this legislation including Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service (now called Global Refuge), Church World Service, the US Chamber of Commerce and American Immigration Lawyers Association. Ms. Pingree’s website gives a list of more proponents.

What can we do to advocate for this change?

Write a letter or an email to your Congressional Representative. Include your address, your reasons as why you want this legislative change, the name of the bill, The Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Adjustment Act, H.R.1325.

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