



September 22, 2015

Chairman Thad Cochran
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S128 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Vice Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S146A The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Cochran and Vice Chairwoman Mikulski,

On behalf of the entire seafood supply chain along the U.S. Gulf coast, we want to thank you for your strong leadership and support for the H-2B visa program. As Congress moves forward with consideration of the final FY 2016 spending measures, we ask that you preserve H-2B visa language from both the House Homeland Security and the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bills that is critical to the survival of the Gulf seafood community.

As you know, seafood processors along the Gulf coast rely on temporary, seasonal, foreign workers admitted to the U.S. under the H-2B visa program to fill the most labor-intensive positions throughout the sector. The work done by these unskilled laborers is necessary to support thousands of seafood jobs held by U.S. workers. In recent years, the Department of Labor has issued several new regulations that are proving unworkable for small seafood businesses. We were very pleased to see Congress address these challenging regulations via the appropriations process and ask that you continue to support the following in the final FY 2016 spending measure:

House Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act language:

- Updating a H-2B visa returning worker exemption allowing that workers who participated in the program in 2013, 2014, and 2015 NOT be counted toward the annual cap on the number of workers;

Senate Department of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Act language:

- Addressing H-2B visa wages and allowing the use of private wage surveys, which are not allowed under the new final H-2B wage rule;
- Defining "seasonal" as ten months, as opposed to the nine months in the new interim final H-2B comprehensive rule;
- Preventing the Department of Labor (DOL) from implementing the provisions of the interim final rule related to corresponding employment and the ¾ wage guarantee;
- Allowing for the staggered crossing of H-2B visa employees in the seafood industry so that workers can be available as varying fisheries seasons commence and ramp up.

Additionally, please continue to reach out to Senate Judiciary Committee leadership and work with them to include H-2B visa relief in a potential visa reauthorization bill.

Again, your leadership and support on this issue continues to be critical to the success of the Gulf seafood community. We appreciate your ongoing efforts to preserve the H-2B workforce for the Gulf coast region's small seafood businesses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harlon Pearce'.

Harlon Pearce
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Henderson'.

Margaret Henderson
Executive Director