

Resolution in Support of the Religious Workforce Protection Act

South Carolina Council of Catholic Women – Diocese of Charleston

Purpose

This resolution advocates for the support and passage of the Religious Workforce Protection Act by urging legislators to protect foreign-born religious workers whose ministry is essential to the life and work of the Church in America. Through this resolution, the South Carolina Council of Catholic Women affirms its commitment to religious freedom, the dignity of those who serve in ministry, and the continuity of pastoral care, while encouraging prayerful and respectful advocacy.

Whereas, the Diocese of Charleston serves Catholics throughout the state of South Carolina and relies on the faithful service of priests, deacons, women and men religious, and chaplains to meet the pastoral, sacramental, and charitable needs of its people; and

Whereas, many of these religious workers are foreign-born individuals who have lawfully entered the United States to serve the Church and are essential to sustaining parish life, Catholic schools, campus ministries, hospitals, and other Catholic institutions; and

Whereas, national surveys indicate that approximately 24 percent of Catholic priests serving in the United States are foreign-born, reflecting the Church's growing reliance on clergy from outside the United States to meet pastoral needs; and

Whereas, these religious workers often minister under the R-1 nonimmigrant religious worker visa and seek lawful permanent residence through the employment-based fourth preference (EB-4) immigrant visa category; and

Whereas, in March and April 2023, the U.S. Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security implemented a policy reinterpretation and visa allocation change that combined applications for special immigrant juveniles and other classes with religious workers in the EB-4 category, causing a significant backlog and retrogression of priority dates; and

Whereas, this change has resulted in extremely long wait times for EB-4 visas, often many years, making it nearly impossible for many foreign-born religious workers to obtain lawful permanent residence before their five-year R-1 visa expires; and

Whereas, under current law, religious workers whose R-1 visas expire before their EB-4 applications are finalized must leave the United States for at least one year before reapplying, thereby interrupting ministry and harming the spiritual life of Catholic communities; and

Whereas, the Religious Workforce Protection Act (S. 1298 / H.R. 2672) would allow foreign-born religious workers with pending adjustment-of-status applications to extend their R-1 status in renewable three-year increments until permanent residency is approved, preserving continuity of ministry; and

Whereas, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has expressed strong support for this legislation, recognizing that its passage would protect religious freedom, sustain pastoral care, and ensure that Catholic parishes and institutions are not left without essential ministers;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the South Carolina Council of Catholic Women:

1. **Expresses its strong support** for the Religious Workforce Protection Act (S. 1298 / H.R. 2672) and urges the South Carolina Congressional Delegation to support and vote in favor of this legislation.
2. **Affirms the vital contributions** of foreign-born religious workers, including the many priests serving throughout the Diocese of Charleston and the nation, who enrich the spiritual life of the Church and meet pastoral needs that might otherwise go unmet.
3. **Recognizes the hardship** created by the 2023 policy change that significantly lengthened EB-4 visa wait times and threatens the ability of foreign-born religious workers to remain lawfully in the United States and continue their ministries.
4. **Encourages Catholic women and all members of the faithful** within the Diocese of Charleston to advocate respectfully with their elected representatives for passage of this bill.
5. **Commits to prayerful support** for foreign-born religious workers affected by immigration delays and for lawmakers tasked with upholding justice, religious freedom, and the common good.
6. **Directs that copies of this resolution** be sent to the Bishop of Charleston, the South Carolina Congressional Delegation, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Council of Catholic Women and the South Carolina Catholic Conference.

Sources

United States Congress. *Religious Workforce Protection Act*. S. 1298, 119th Cong. (2025).

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