

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 29, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

We are writing about the insufficient number of H-2B visas and the harm that their limited availability will have on businesses in Maine and across the country. We ask that you use your authority, provided in the fiscal year (FY) 2021 Homeland Security Appropriations law, to increase the number of H-2B visas from 66,000 to 135,320, which is the amount that was available in FY 2007, the same year that the Returning Worker Exemption was in effect.

Your predecessors have used this authority to issue additional visas every year since FY 2017, with the exception of FY 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. The Department of Labor (DOL) has received requests for more than 96,000 worker positions for the 33,000 available slots in the first half of FY 2021. The demand for these visas demonstrates that many areas of our country simply lack the working-age population needed to meet the demand for seasonal jobs, particularly in the hospitality sector.

H-2B workers help seasonal businesses such as inns, restaurants, and hotels operate at full capacity. I have already heard from Maine businesses, particularly in the tourism and hospitality industries, that the demand for workers already exceeds the number of available visas. These businesses face cutting back operations, which also puts at risk the jobs of American workers who fill year-round positions at these businesses.

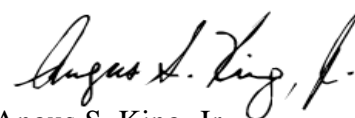
As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt our nation's public health and economy, it is encouraging to see vaccine administration trending in positive directions. Through funding provided on a bipartisan basis, many of our small businesses have been able to survive the pandemic; however, we need to ensure that businesses have the employees to succeed after a lost year of revenue.

We ask that you increase the number of available H-2B visas as soon as possible so that employers will have a sufficient number of employees for the upcoming season. Thank you for your attention to this urgent request.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress