

Maryland Senate Finance  
Senate Office Building, 11 Bladen St., Annapolis, Maryland 21401

House Economic Matters Committee  
House Office Building, 6 Bladen St., Annapolis, Maryland, 21401

**RE: SB 526 / HB 1493 – SUPPORT**

Dear Members of the Senate Finance and House Economic Matters Committees:

On behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union (“ACLU”) of Maryland, I am writing to express support for SB 526 / HB 1493, legislation to protect internationally recruited workers in Maryland from labor exploitation and trafficking.

The ACLU of Maryland is a non-profit with over 40,000 members that works to protect the civil rights and civil liberties of all people in the state of Maryland. We strive to uplift the voices of vulnerable populations, and empower disenfranchised communities to lead efforts for change in a collaborative way, through legal and legislative advocacy. Migrant communities are among the most susceptible victims in Maryland to violations of civil rights and civil liberties, and abuse committed by their employers.

In 2016, over 36,000 workers came to work in Maryland on temporary work visas. These workers are an integral part of our communities and our economy. They care for our children, shovel our snow, pick our vegetables, program our computers, advance our universities, and teach our children. Across visa categories and industry sectors, internationally recruited workers experience similar patterns of abuse. Recruiters discriminate in hiring, mislead workers as to the terms of employment, and charge workers recruitment fees that leave them indebted on the job. These debts serve as a barrier to reporting abuses, and as a result, Maryland is less safe.

When internationally recruited workers suffer abuses, the State of Maryland suffers. By eliminating recruitment fees for work in Maryland, ensuring workers receive a contract at the time of recruitment, and banning discrimination and retaliation, this legislation would combat debt bondage, human trafficking, and other forms of labor exploitation in Maryland.

Through a public registry of recruiters, the bill would root out bad actors and level the playing field for employers who want to do right by their workers. By requiring recruiters to provide workers with an employment contract, this bill would ensure that workers coming to Maryland are fully informed of the terms of their employment before they decide to take a job.

The ACLU of Maryland strongly encourages you to pass SB 526 / HB 1493. Thank you for making Maryland a place where internationally recruited workers are respected and workplaces work for all workers.

Sincerely,



Nick Steiner, Esq. | ACLU of Maryland

Equal Justice Works Immigrants’ Rights Fellow

Sponsored by the Ottinger Foundation

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