



# Migration that Works

## **Oral testimony on House Bill 1543 - Support with Amendments (FWA)**

### **HB1543 – Labor and Employment – Temporary Workers**

#### **Government, Labor, and Elections Committee**

**March 5, 2026**

By Rachel Micah-Jones, Chair,  
Migration that Works

Good afternoon. My name is Rachel Micah-Jones and I'm testifying today as Chair of Migration that Works. I am also the founder and executive director of Centro de los Derechos del Migrante—the Center for Migrant Rights or CDM.

Migration that Works is a coalition of labor unions, migrant rights organizations, anti-trafficking groups, and researchers who are advancing an alternative labor migration model that respects the human rights of workers and their families.

Founded in 2011 as the International Labor Recruitment Working Group (“ILRWG”), Migration that Works advances worker rights for internationally recruited workers across industries and visa categories.

The United States’ work visa programs are rife with abuses. CDM and other Migration that Works members have documented illegal fees, fraud, discrimination, retaliation, and forced labor in the programs, which tie workers to a single employer. Each year, between 1 and 1.5 million temporary visa workers arrive in the U.S. They work in agriculture, landscaping and seafood, as well as in the automotive, tech and healthcare industries, among others. They arrive on a variety of visas - from H-2A to TN. Our research has documented abuses across the visa categories.

HB 1543 proposes to establish a unit in the Maryland Department of Labor (“MDOL”) dedicated to enforcing the rights of temporary visa workers, and enhance protections for H-2A and H-2B migrant workers in our state. The bill would help protect migrant workers from economic coercion in recruitment, improve worker accessibility of the MDOL administrative complaint process, and make explicit migrant workers’ right to guests in employer-provided housing.

We support these protections and believe *all* migrant workers who work in Maryland on temporary work visas should benefit from these protections, not just those on H-2 visas.

We support HB 1543's additional protections from recruitment fees and other forms of economic coercion in recruitment, as well as the protection from retaliation. Employers and recruiters from outside of Maryland employ workers in work visa programs in our state. We recommend that the Committee amend HB 1543 to require *all* recruiters who recruit for employers who employ migrant workers in Maryland to register, regardless of where the recruiter and employer are based.

Finally, we support HB 1543's guarantee of migrant workers' right to have guests in employer-provided housing, which ensures their access to crucial services and information.

HB 1543's protections from recruitment coercion are a good first step towards bringing us closer to a more just labor migration policy envisioned by Migration that Works's alternative model. The Alternative Model shifts control over the labor migration process from employers to workers, elevates labor standards for all workers, responds to established labor market needs, respects family unity, ensures equity and access to justice, and affords migrant workers an accessible pathway to citizenship.

The alternative model would robustly protect workers, while also ensuring that employers who uphold their legal obligations are not undercut by low-road employers. In this alternative model, internationally recruited workers would self-petition for their visas, and all workers would connect directly with certified employers through a multilingual, government-hosted database of available jobs. The simple and accessible self-petition process would eliminate the need for recruiters and would root out the abuses recruiters perpetuate—from charging fees and discriminating to retaliating against workers who speak out about abuses. Through the government's job-matching database, workers could more easily change employers. This model would replace the patchwork of inadequate regulations that currently harm workers across visa categories and industries.

Thank you.

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