

# President Obama Signs Continuing Resolution That Includes Extension of Four Immigration Programs

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On December 9, 2016, President Barack Obama signed H.R. 2028 (Pub. L. 114-254), a stop-gap spending bill to keep the government running through April 28, 2017. H.R. 2028 includes a Continuing Resolution that extends four immigration programs: The Conrad 30 J Waiver, the Non-Minister Special Immigrant Religious Worker Visa, the EB-5 Regional Center Visa Program, and the E-Verify Program.

The programs operate as follows:

- The Conrad 30 J Waiver Program allows foreign physicians who have trained in the United States to apply for a waiver of the two-year home residence requirement that would otherwise obligate them to return to their home countries for two years in exchange for providing full-time medical care over a three-year period to patients in health professional shortage areas or medically underserved populations in the United States.
- The Non-Minister Special Immigrant Religious Worker Visa makes it possible for non-ministers in religious vocations and occupations who will work in the United States in either a professional or non-professional capacity to apply for permanent residence in the United States.
- The EB-5 Regional Center Program allows foreign individuals who invest at least \$500,000 into commercial enterprises associated with regional centers specifically designated by the USCIS because of their potential to promote economic growth to apply for green cards. Although there were attempts to comprehensively reform this program, Congress ran out of time and the program simply was extended.
- E-Verify is the government's electronic employment eligibility verification system, extension of which means the service will not be disrupted for the many companies across the United States that participate in the program.

The Continuing Resolution did not include an extension of the H-2B Returning Worker Exemption. The H-2B Temporary Non-Agricultural Workers Program allows workers to temporarily enter the

United States to perform work that is needed seasonally, intermittently, for peak-load situations, or for a one-time occurrence. These visas are used by the landscaping, hospitality, tourism, and construction industries, among others. There is a cap of 66,000 H-2B visas available annually. The exemption had allowed individuals who had been in the United States in H-2B status in the previous three years to apply again without being subject to that cap, thereby allowing more than 66,000 workers to use those visas annually.

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