

Bordallo asks Homeland Security to help with H-2B crisis

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(Photo: Rick Cruz/PDN)

In an effort to resolve the territory's [ongoing H-2B visa crisis](/story/news/2016/12/30/no-10-h-2b-visa-denials-cause-construction-industry-woes/95991646/) (/story/news/2016/12/30/no-10-h-2b-visa-denials-cause-construction-industry-woes/95991646/), Guam Del. Madeleine Bordallo recently spoke with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security about Guam's inability to fill important construction and health care positions with foreign labor.

Bordallo met with Ben Cassidy, U.S. Department of Homeland Security's assistant secretary for legislative affairs, to discuss H-2B visa denials, Bordallo's office said in a news release. Since early 2016, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has denied nearly 100 percent of all H-2B visas for Guam.

"I stressed to Assistant Secretary Cassidy the importance of the H-2B program on Guam, particularly to the [military buildup](/story/news/2017/04/27/military-buildup-presses-while-cautious-historic-properties/100965786/) (/story/news/2017/04/27/military-buildup-presses-while-cautious-historic-properties/100965786/), which includes hundreds of millions of dollars in military construction," Bordallo said in the release. "This change was a result of internal decisions, and I believe that (Homeland Security) can address this situation internally, without legislative action."

(Story continues below video.)

The number of Guam's H-2B visa workers has plummeted to nearly zero, and thousands of foreign workers' applications to work on island have been denied, Bordallo said.

Bordallo said she had tried to resolve the issue last year by including language in the fiscal 2017 [National Defense Authorization Act](http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20161128/CRPT-114HRPT-S2943.pdf) (<http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20161128/CRPT-114HRPT-S2943.pdf>). Bordallo's provision would have provided relief for Department of Defense-funded construction as well as the health care industry.

Although the measure passed the U.S. House of Representatives, her provision was removed prior to the bill passing. Bordallo's office said she's again trying to get the provision in the fiscal 2018 defense act while working with Homeland Security officials.

"I asked Assistant Secretary Cassidy to discuss the issue with (Homeland Security) Secretary (John) Kelly and leadership," Bordallo said. "(Cassidy) committed to raising the issue and communicating openly with me and my staff."

Adelup announced Tuesday that Gov. Eddie Calvo has put together a task force, led by the local Department of Labor, to conduct an impact study the H-2B visa denials have had on Guam's local businesses.

Based on preliminary reports, hundred of millions of dollars in public and private projects have been affected by the labor shortage, according to Adelup. The governor's office also said construction costs have risen, which could cause an economic downturn.

The governor's office is encouraging local business owners to participate in an online survey at the labor agency's website to gauge the H-2B crisis' impact on the company and help the task force complete its study.

"I want to provide the federal government with real numbers, statistics that illustrate how the denials are slowing our economy," Calvo said in a press release.

"We're asking all of the private companies to participate in the survey and help us provide as comprehensive a report as possible as we work to lift policies holding us back," Lt. Gov. Ray Tenorio added in the release.

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