



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

December 14, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

We urge you to allow Belarusian students who are in this country under F-1 visas to be eligible for Special Student Relief (SSR) so that the scope of employment available to them is widened in case they are forced to return to Belarus because of economic hardship. We further request that you extend Temporary Protective Status (TPS) to Belarusian democracy activists in the United States, allowing them a safe harbor until they may return to Belarus to contribute to that country's democratic transition.

Should students be forced to return to Belarus, there is a likelihood that some may be subject to prosecution on account of political beliefs they expressed while students in the United States. Providing SSR would allow these students to have the full benefit of an American education so that they will be better equipped to contribute to Belarus's future democratic transition.

The worsening democratic and economic situation in Belarus creates significant financial obstacles for students from Belarus who rely heavily on remittances from their families in Belarus to support them in the United States during their studies. While the regime seeks to continue financing its repression apparatus, ordinary Belarusians suffer from accelerating inflation and rising consumer prices.

If students are forced to return home, they will return to a Belarus in which President Alyaksandr Lukashenka brutally suppresses any challenge to his regime with arbitrary arrests, torture, and even extrajudicial killings. These students, equipped with an American education, will comprise the next generation of leaders in Belarus. Formed with an American sensibility of respect for human rights and democracy, they could be seen as foreign agents and targeted for persecution. Helping these Belarusian students remain in the United States to finish their studies is both in the interest of the United States and the right thing to do. These students are an investment in the future of Belarus, a future generation of Belarusian leaders that we are forming in our universities.

We also ask you to extend TPS status to Belarusian democracy activists in the United States who cannot return to Belarus for fear of persecution. Since the August 9, 2020 fraudulent presidential election, Lukashenka has ordered one of the worst crackdowns of democracy activists and media professionals in the country's history. Many of these activists have been compelled to flee Belarus, fearing persecution, prison, and torture if they return. TPS status for those Belarusian activists in the United States would allow them to remain here until they can safely return to Belarus.

Thank you for considering our request to include **Belarusian students in the United States in the list of students eligible for SSR, and extending TPS to democracy activists.**

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress



JAMES P. MCGOVERN
Member of Congress



WILLIAM R. KEATING
Member of Congress



JOE WILSON
Member of Congress



MARCY KAPTUR
Member of Congress