

The SECURE Act

The SECURE Act, introduced by Senators Van Hollen, Cardin, and Feinstein, will address uncertainty surrounding Temporary Protected Status in the United States.

Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is granted to nationals of countries who cannot return to their home country due to dangerous circumstances, including;

- Ongoing armed conflict
- An environmental disaster or epidemic
- Other extraordinary and temporary conditions.

Currently, there are approximately 437,000 people with TPS in the United States from ten designated countries: El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. More than 90 percent are from El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti. Because TPS is granted for set periods of time ranging from six to 18 months, decisions must be made on a recurring basis to extend status. Every time their TPS status is extended by DHS TPS recipients must submit a new application and pass a clean background check. In many cases, TPS has been extended for decades as country conditions have failed to improve, and recipients have built lives, started businesses, and raised children in the United States.

TPS for Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone expired in May 2017. In May, Haiti's TPS designation was extended for only six months. In September, DHS announced plans to terminate Sudan's designation while extending South Sudan's designation by 18 months to May 2019. Earlier this month, DHS canceled TPS for Nicaragua. DHS was unable to reach a decision regarding TPS for Honduras which automatically extended their legal for six months. Additional decisions are expected next week for Haiti and in January for El Salvador.

Uncertainty over the extension of status and continued dangerous circumstances in their home countries has created considerable hardship for TPS recipients and their families, including American-born children. The SECURE Act will provide certainty for these individuals and their communities by giving them the ability to apply for legal permanent residency.

Under the bill, all TPS recipients who qualified for Temporary Protected Status the last time the designation was made by the Secretary of Homeland Security and who have been continuously present in the United States for at least three years would be eligible to apply for legal permanent residency.

This action is necessary because the conditions in TPS countries remain volatile. For example, the State Department website warns U.S. citizens to "carefully consider the risks of travel to El Salvador due to the high rates of crime and violence." For the past two years, El Salvador has been ranked as the murder capital of the world, and its capital, San Salvador, ranked as the most murderous city in the world.

With the State Department issuing these clear warnings to American citizens and government employees, we should not force TPS recipients to return to unstable and dangerous conditions. The SECURE Act will provide for their continued security with the families and communities they have built in the United States.