

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
United States Senate
December 7, 2011

I thank our witnesses for joining us today to discuss the EB-5 Regional Center Program and its proven record of creating jobs in America. In 2011 alone, this program is on track to create an estimated 25,000 jobs, and provide direct investments in American communities of \$1.25 billion dollars. And there is great potential to increase the program's annual benefits. If the full number of visas allocated to the program are utilized, based upon investment and job creation requirements, this program has the potential to create or preserve 100,000 jobs per year, with contributions of \$5 billion in foreign capital investment. And these benefits come at no cost to American taxpayers. This program is and should continue to be an important component of our overall immigration system that contributes to our economic growth.

The current authorization for the program is set to expire at the end of September 2012. It is critical that Congress support U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), which administers the program, along with the many men and women who are working hard to bring jobs to their communities, by enacting the permanent authorization legislation that I introduced in March of this year. I thank the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees, and Border Security, Senator Schumer, for joining me as a cosponsor of this legislation. I know that like many parts of the United States, from Alabama to Vermont, entrepreneurs in New York City have turned to financing through the EB-5 Regional Center Program.

Like any program, there is always room for improvement. I commend Director Mayorkas at USCIS and Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano for making the program a central part of the Department's contribution to President Obama's broader job creation efforts and for their efforts to improve it. The history of our Nation has been written in part through the contributions of immigrants. The EB-5 visa and other employment-based visa categories within our immigration system can play a meaningful role in writing our future economic resurgence.

In addition to USCIS's administrative efforts, I have been working for many months with interested parties and USCIS to put together a legislative framework to make significant improvements to the overall program. This framework will provide USCIS with additional authorities to ensure that this important program maintains the highest level of integrity and efficiency. I have shared this framework with the Judiciary Committee's ranking member, Senator Grassley, and I hope we can work together to make this program an even more secure and effective job creation engine for Americans across the country.

We should be moving forward without further delay to reauthorize this important program. Congress must show potential investors from around the world that America welcomes immigrant investors and values their contributions. If we do not, potential investors will be lost to Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and other nations that recognize immigration through investment. We are already hearing that the uncertainty about the program's future is a drag on investments and on our economic recovery.

The Committee will hear from Bill Stenger of Jay Peak, Vermont. His work, financed in part through the EB-5 Regional Center Program, has revitalized a very rural part of Vermont, and turned a beloved and iconic Vermont ski resort into a world class, four-season resort. In Texas, the City of Dallas has recently entered a partnership with a capital management firm to create the City of Dallas Regional Center to develop projects and create jobs for the people of Dallas. Companies like Marriot Hotels and Lennar Homes have turned to the EB-5 program to finance job-creating projects around the country. Projects like this are occurring all over America, and there is every reason to support these job creators as well as the immigrants who wish to invest in and contribute to America.

Reauthorization of the EB-5 Regional Center Program should not be controversial. This program has been in existence for 18 years. It is time for a permanent authorization to provide investors with the certainty and predictability they need to invest and conduct business with confidence.

#####