

Compact of Free Association

The Compacts of Free Association are a series of treaties between the United States, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI). These treaties were established as compensation for the loss of life, health, land, and resources due to the numerous nuclear weapons tests on the Marshall Islands and Bikini and Enewetak Atolls issued by the U.S. from 1946 to 1958.

The purpose of the Compacts is to allow citizens of Micronesia to live and legally work in the U.S. without a visa, as well as have access to social and health services.

Issue

The Compact of Free Association between our nations is not being upheld by the US because the I-94 document granting rights to work and live legally in the US has an outdated and inaccessible system that excludes people from obtaining this document.

Immediate Challenges

- There is no modern online system to process I-94.
 - The current system makes it difficult to locate client names, there needs to be a better search query option
 - There is consistent errors and ineligible applications due to system errors
- There is no direct consistent contact at Custom Border Patrol to help troubleshoot online system errors
 - There is no CBP contact that speaks the native languages
 - There is no contact for Seattle but we have heard that the Spokane community has someone that they can work with. We would like this for our Seattle community.
- There is a long backlog of applications of I-102 applications

Consequences

People are living in poverty without a home, without the ability to work, without the ability to access healthcare because they do not have a work permit that allows them to get a license and grants them access to basic national rights.

Short-term Demands

1. Increase personnel capacity of Custom Border Patrol to support I-94 processing
 - a. A consistent schedule with working hours
 - b. Someone directly being available in Seattle to troubleshoot consistently on a weekly basis
2. A better online system
 - a. Better query system to locate names when there is not an exact match for names
 - b. Fix the FOIA online platform to pull I-94s
3. COFA Nation Signage and Training at all government offices (Transportation, Homeland security, etc.)
 - a. All governmental offices have a sign explaining what the COFA Agreement is, why citizens have this status, and recognizing the commitment the United States has made to COFA Nations Long-term
 - b. A training for all government offices describing this COFA Agreement
4. Expedite social security cards for COFA
5. We want to be able to speak on behalf of our clients without the G-28 and I-102

Consequences

We currently have a growing list of 17 individuals that need their I-94 documents. Without direct support, they have no access to a job and cannot afford housing, food, or other basic needs.

We also have 6 families waiting in shelters for their I-94 document. Some of our families do not speak English and require interpreters to be present for all interactions. We have staff supporting as best as they can to fill out forms and interpret, but the current systems presents many barriers to accessing the necessary information.

Long-term Demands

1. Restore COFA citizen's rights to formerly incarcerated people.
2. Adding international airport issuing of I-94 documents.
 - a. Talking Points: The cost of only getting document through physical border is costly, inadequate, and absurd
3. Provide educational awareness, financial, and in person support to path to U.S. Citizenship for COFA
4. Allow citizens to receive their I-94 and social security card while they are living on the islands before moving to the United States
5. Have wider access to vision and dental care under Medicaid insurance