



United States Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

Senator Susan M. Collins, Chairman

April 03, 2006

SENATOR COLLINS INTRODUCES "MAINEIACS" AMENDMENT TO ENABLE AMERICAN SPORTS TEAMS TO RECRUIT TALENTED PLAYERS FROM ABROAD Amendment to Immigration Legislation Would Benefit MAINEiacs and other Minor League Teams

WASHINGTON, DC— Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Susan Collins, who has worked to help Canadian members of the Lewiston MAINEiacs hockey team obtain visas so they can play in the US, has introduced an amendment to the immigration reform bill that would address the shortage of visas currently available for these and other talented athletes. Her legislation would expand the P-1 visa program, which is currently available only to major league athletes of teams recognized at an international level, to include athletes that play on high-level amateur teams such as the Lewiston MAINEiacs and the Portland Sea Dogs.

Major League Baseball strongly supports the expansion of the P-1 visa category to include professional minor league baseball players and has endorsed Senator Collins' amendment.

Under current law, minor league athletes can qualify only for H-2B nonimmigrant visas, which are in short supply and provided to seasonal workers such as hotel and restaurant employees. Senator Collins, who worked last year to help secure H-2B visas for MAINEiacs players so they could complete their season, believes that these players should be eligible for P-1 visas.

Senator Collins said, "Across the United States, the H-2B visa shortage has been a significant concern to many in a wide variety of industries. But what many people don't know is that in addition to hotel and restaurant employees and many other seasonal workers, many talented, highly competitive foreign athletes also use these visas. Minor league athletes, unlike their counterparts at major league franchises, are lumped into this same oversubscribed visa category, despite the obvious differences in the nature of work they perform."

Senator Collins pointed to the Lewiston MAINEiacs as an example of why minor league athletes should be included in the P-1 visa program.

"The MAINEiacs franchise has faced tremendous difficulties in obtaining the H-2B visas necessary for the majority of its player to come to the US to play in the team's first home games of their 2004-2005 season. As a result the team had to reschedule or cancel several early season games. This has placed a hardship on the team, its talented players, and has threatened the significant revenue the team generates for the city of Lewiston and businesses in the surrounding area," said Senator Collins.

Specifically, Senators Collins's amendment would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to

expand the “P” nonimmigrant visa category. It would make eligible for the P-1 visa:

- Athletes playing for a team that is located in the United States and a member of a foreign league of 15 or more amateur sports teams, if:
 - that league is the highest level of amateur performance of that sport in the foreign country,
 - players on that team are ineligible under NCAA rules to play that sport at an American college or university, and
 - a significant number of the players in the league are drafted by major league sports teams or their minor league affiliates;
- Coaches for the foreign amateur sports teams described above;
- “professional athletes,” including players for minor league teams associated with one of the major professional sports leagues; and athletes, performing individually or as part of a group, in a theatrical ice skating production.

Senator Collins’ amendment would also make it possible for teams applying for P-1 visas on behalf of their players to include more than one player on a single visa petition, as is currently permitted for H-2B visa applicants. The team will be required to pay a single, flat fee for each such petition.

Lastly, this bill makes explicit that this change will not prevent these athletes, or the teams that employ them, from applying for other types of nonimmigrant visas.

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