

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8017

As of February 7, 2020

Brief Description: Addressing compacts of free association.

Sponsors: Senators Hasegawa, Hunt, Billig, Saldaña, Stanford and Wilson, C.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/05/20, 2/07/20.

Brief Summary of Joint Memorial

- Requests that Congress take appropriate steps to address issues concerning citizens of nations with Compacts of Free Association agreements.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Staff: Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

Background: Compact of Free Association (COFA) is a set of compacts between the United States and three sovereign states—the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), and the Republic of Palau. COFA was originally established in 1986. In 1994, the compact between the United States and Republic of Palau was finalized. In 2003, the compacts with RMI and FSM were renewed for 20 years. Citizens of nations with COFA agreements may enter, lawfully reside, and work in the United States, serve in the United States military and receive some federal assistance.

Summary of Joint Memorial: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Joint Memorial (Proposed Substitute): The Legislature requests that Congress take the appropriate steps to:

- restore federal benefits for COFA migrants, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Medicaid;
- ensure that citizens of nations with COFA agreements are appropriately counted as part of the 2020 census;

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

- consider the uniqueness of COFA status in all immigration policies, including exempting citizens of nations with COFA agreements from changes to the public charge rules; and
- immediately begin work on COFA renewal negotiations.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Proposed Substitute: PRO: COFA is a unique treaty that the United States (U.S.) has with these three island nations. The U.S. used their homeland as bombing practice for nuclear weapons. In return these migrants get to travel to the US without a visa. The U.S. provides no services for this community here and so they remain one of the most impoverished communities in the U.S. COFA migrants are one of the fastest growing populations in Washington. This is a great resolution for the state of Washington because it not only recognizes the treaty, and people, but it also expresses the importance of the federal relationship. This asks the U.S. to step up to their moral obligation to bring justice to these people. Congress is already working on a proposal, and this will help move that forward.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Bob Hasegawa, Prime Sponsor; David Anitok, COFA Alliance National Network of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.