News



Jean-Michel Gisnel cries out while praying with other congregants at the First Haitian Evangelical Church of Springfield, Sunday, January 26, 2025, in Springfield, Ohio. (AP/Luis Andres Henao)

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The United States House, in a bipartisan effort that highlighted Republican division over the Trump administration's immigration policies, passed a bill Thursday (April 16) to allow Haitian migrants temporary legal protections to live in the U.S. for three years. The vote came as the government is fighting at the Supreme Court to end Temporary Protected Status for an estimated 330,000 Haitians currently in the country.

The bill now goes to the Senate, and President Donald Trump said he would veto it if it reached his desk.

Introduced last year by Rep. Laura Gillen, D-New York, the bill passed 224-204, with the support of 10 Republican lawmakers. The bill's text had been stuck in the House Committee on Rules and reached the full House after 218 representatives supported a discharge petition — the first time such a rare move enabled an immigration bill to pass.

The Rev. Keny Felix, a senior pastor at Bethel Evangelical Baptist Church in Miami, was one of many Haitian pastors who met with House members in Washington, D.C., over the past month to persuade them to support the bill. Felix said in a statement that the vote "affirms the dignity of our Haitian neighbors, whose homeland continues to be marked by unrestrained gang violence, government instability, and a growing humanitarian crisis where more than a million people have been internally displaced. "

The status, granted to Haitians in 2010 after a deadly earthquake, allows those who fled to live and work legally in the U.S. It has been maintained through the years due to gang violence in Port-au-Prince, the country's capital.

Former Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, who was fired by Trump in March, announced early last year she would terminate the status because the island's safety conditions no longer justified it. Noem's decision, which would

have ended TPS in February 2026, has been challenged in multiple lawsuits, including some filed by Haitian faith organizations.

In February, hours before the status was set to expire, a U.S. district judge blocked Noem's attempt to terminate TPS, saying the secretary's order overlooked records showing Haiti was still plagued by a "perfect storm of suffering" that had a "staggering humanitarian toll." In her February ruling, Judge Ana Reyes said the secretary's decision seemed motivated, "at least in part," by racial animus against a group of immigrants from a non-white country.

The government appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. In March, Justices agreed to hear arguments in *Trump* v. *Miot* on Haitians' TPS, and *Noem* v. *Doe*, on Syrians' TPS, during the court's April session. A ruling is expected in June.

The Haitian community has been a target of Trump and Vice President JD Vance since their 2024 presidential campaign, when both pushed false claims that Haitians living in Springfield, Ohio, ate their neighbors' pets.

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On April 3, Trump posted a video of a Haitian man beating a woman to death with a hammer in Fort Myers, Florida, on his Truth Social account. In the post caption, the president described the incident as "the most vicious things you will ever see" and brought Haitians' TPS into question, pointing at the government's efforts to win termination of the status at the Supreme Court.

The Springfield controversy put the city's 15,000 Haitians under the spotlight but also fueled solidarity efforts among its faith community. In recent months, G92, a local coalition of pro-immigrant churches, has led the efforts to defend Haitians' TPS. As they awaited the February ruling, the group staged faux immigration arrest scenarios at local churches to teach best practices to faith leaders in the event of raids at houses of worship. The group also sent a delegation to D.C. in March in support of the bill.

Felix's D.C. delegation, which attended a lunch briefing for Haitian clergy at the Cannon House Office Building in late March, included a representative of the Fellowship of Haitian Evangelical Pastors in New England and a Haitian faith leader from Indiana. The meeting, sponsored by Rep. Ayanna Pressley, D-Massachusetts,

was coordinated by Faith in Action, a national network that organizes faith communities advocating for immigrants.

"For years, our Haitian siblings have lived with the constant threat of displacement despite contributing to the fabric of our communities," said Claudette David, of Faith in Action International, in a statement.

"Today, we honor their organized power and resilience and celebrate one important step toward a more just and humane immigration system, one that recognizes that these TPS holders are image bearers of God."

The bill co-sponsors include Haitian-American Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Florida; Rep. Michael Lawler, R-New York; and Rep. Thomas Suozzi, D-New York. Republican lawmakers who supported the bill include Mike Carey and Mike Turner of Ohio, Rich McCormick of Georgia, and Mario Diaz-Balart of Florida.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.