VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy, Leader Jeffries, Leader Schumer, and Leader McConnell:

We write to emphasize our support for the early renewal of the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement (HOPE) and the Haiti Economic Lift Program (HELP) Acts, commonly known as HOPE/HELP. These preference programs benefit the Republic of Haiti by granting preferential treatment for certain apparel, supporting Haiti’s largest industrial sector. The Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) urges you to support the reauthorization of the program this year.

HOPE/HELP is linked to both the Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act (CBERA) and the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA) and allows duty-free access for certain apparel and textile products from Haiti to the U.S. market. When the HOPE bill was first passed in 2006, there were less than 9,000 workers in Haiti’s garment sector. As a result of the HOPE and HELP programs, employment in the garment sector recently reached a peak of almost 60,000 workers. Further, apparel exports have grown to over $1 billion, representing over 90% of Haiti’s total exports. The apparel sector is the backbone of Haiti’s economy and the foundation for the country’s economic development.

Recent Congressional efforts to bring more apparel production to the Hemisphere, and focus on near-shoring and re-shoring, represent additional opportunities to expand the sector and the badly needed employment in Haiti – just as the Administration has been emphasizing bringing more apparel employment to the Northern Triangle countries of Central America. Unfortunately, due to the uncertainty of HOPE/HELP renewal, Haiti’s apparel sector is losing momentum and employment.

Last September, SAE-A, one of the largest employers in Haiti’s apparel industry, announced the elimination of 4,000 jobs. This year, Haiti is in jeopardy of losing SAE-A altogether. Continued apparel job reductions in Haiti are anticipated.
One immediate step Congress must take to reassure investors would be to reauthorize the HOPE/HELP program for an additional ten years. The current authorization expires in just two years, and no investor will commit without longer-term certainty for their access to the U.S. market. Unlike the CAFTA-DR countries that enjoy a permanent free trade agreement framework to offer investors, Haiti can offer only the promise of temporary benefits under HOPE/HELP. Congress recognized this need for longer-term predictability in 2015 by providing a ten-year reauthorization of HOPE/HELP five years before its expiration in 2020. This is why renewal this year is essential.

HOPE/HELP contains some of the most detailed and prescriptive labor compliance requirements of any U.S. trade legislation. For instance, the legislation requires the ILO to monitor every apparel factory and report publicly on its compliance record. It also requires the appointment of a labor ombudsperson to support the effective implementation of the law. Importantly, the legislation gives the U.S. Administration the authority to remove any factory from the benefits of the program if it fails to meet the labor conditions required. These stringent labor standards have created space for unions to develop; when HOPE/HELP was first implemented, there were zero unions in Haiti’s apparel sector. Today, Haiti’s apparel sector has forty unions. This is not to say that there is not more work to do on labor compliance – but the requisite tools are built into the legislation for the Administration to engage and support getting it done.

For these reasons, the CBC strongly urges your support for the immediate reauthorization of the HOPE/HELP legislation for a further ten years (until 2035). There is currently a bill that has been reintroduced in the Senate – the Haiti Economic Lift Program Extension Act, which would reauthorize the HOPE/HELP programs through 2035. Urgent action on this bill or similar legislation is essential and in our interest.

We thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick
Member of Congress

Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress