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**Experts urge migrants to be proactive & vocal following new immigration laws**

Two immigration law experts are urging migrant workers and communities to make their voices heard so new powers introduced to Parliament this week, to help manage visa changes, are only used as they are intended.

Deborah Manning, Barrister, and Nicola Tiffen, Immigration Law Partner at Anthony Harper, encouraged individuals and communities to be proactive and vocal through contacting their MPs, community leaders and the media, so politicians know how the public feel about their decisions and how people are affected by their decisions.

Ms Manning said: *“There is always a risk when government is given broad powers and people need to know they can speak up so decision-makers, like politicians, can hear and understand their concerns and be accountable to the community.”*

The advice comes as the Government introduced a bill into Parliament Tuesday to amend immigration law in order to help manage visa changes for large numbers of migrants impacted by COVID-19. The amendment bill will give government eight time-limited powers.

According to Ms Manning who specialises in human rights and immigration law and is convener of the Auckland District Law Society Refugee and Immigration Committee, the government has been clear that they do not want any migrants to be disadvantaged by COVID-19.

*“Through this amendment bill, I believe the government is trying to find a way to manage the difficulties and delays, and support the welfare of migrants,”* Ms Manning said.

*“More will become known about the amendment bill and new powers over the coming weeks. I hope it will be able to make a difference as people’s lives and livelihoods have been turned upside-down,”* she said.

The two experts, speaking at Belong Aotearoa’s ‘Immigration and your rights during COVID’ webinar, explained key aspects of the new bill and offered more tips and advice to migrant workers impacted by COVID-19.

According to Nicola Tiffen who has over 18 years’ experience in immigration law both in New Zealand and abroad, it is a stressful time for many who are here on work visas.

*“Many tuning in to the webinar felt uncertain about their situation in New Zealand and were concerned about losing their job,”* she said.

Manning and Tiffen’s number one piece of advice for migrants is to get professional advice from an immigration lawyer or adviser.

*“Your immigration status is absolutely critical for your future – for you and your loved ones, so it is a smart move to find an affordable adviser. Ask and look around for recommendations,”* Ms Manning said.

Ms Tiffen’s tips for keeping costs down include having all your paperwork and documentation together in the one place.

*“It doesn’t have to cost a huge amount to get professional advice. It can often be more costly if you leave it too long to get professional advice and it becomes a bit of a mess. Act early if you can or start putting some money aside to help cover the costs,”* She said.

**Manning and Tiffen’s top tips for getting help and helping yourself were:**

* Get help from an experienced immigration adviser or lawyer.
* Put your paperwork in one place – bring it with you to the lawyer.
* Find your employment agreement and job description – bring that too!
* Keep evidence of staying in touch with your partner.
* Emails and letters must be clear and not too long – get help from a friend.
* Be honest. Immigration New Zealand requires honesty.
* Don’t rely on the automatic 25 September expiry date.
* Check when your medicals and police certificates expire.

A poll of the webinar audience found:

* 62% (38 out of 61) are very uncertain or uncertain about their current situation in Aotearoa New Zealand.
* 52% (30 out of 58) are worried about losing their job.
* 25% (15 out of 60) are worried about deportation.

The webinar which can now be viewed online covered:

* Changing your employer or your visa (11:30)
* Getting help and helping yourself – including practical tips for moving forward (20:10)
* Having to leave New Zealand – including voluntary departure and involuntary deportation (29:40)
* Immigration (Covid-19 Response) Amendment Bill – what is known so far (41:53)
* Question & answer session (49:25)

Belong Aotearoa is holding more webinars in their COVID-19 & Employment for migrants series. Visit [www.belong.org.nz](http://www.belong.org.nz/) for more details.

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