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Clock is Ticking for Our Haitian Neighbors and Employers Alike

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Haiti's Temporary Protective Status (TPS) is set to end officially on **February 3, 2026**, after the Secretary of Homeland Security terminated the designation, determining it's contrary to national interest. This means Haitian nationals and others who had TPS must prepare to leave the U.S. or find another lawful status by that date.

Unless the TPS is extended, thousands of Haitians living and working in Lee County will face an impossible decision. Return to country that is considered dangerous and unstable or risk being detained by ICE and forcibly deported.

"We work very hard here in South Florida and throughout the country, putting food on the table, building the buildings you see, working in hospitality, elder care, and restaurants," Farah Larrieux, Chair of Miramar Haitian-American Residents and Business Owners (MHARBO) and a TPS recipient from Haiti said. "Many TPS holders have built decades-long lives in the U.S., raising families and establishing careers without any permanent path to legal status. When asked why so many longtime residents remain on temporary protections, Larrieux pointed to years of gridlock in Washington. "We didn't choose to be undocumented," she said. "For many years, both parties failed us. They failed to pass immigration reform, and that's why so many people got stuck in the middle."

Recent data from 2023-2025 suggests several thousand Haitians live in Lee County, with estimates ranging from around **6,200 to over 6,500** in areas like Lehigh Acres and North Fort Myers, and thousands more in the broader region. In addition to farm labor, Haitian workers are commonly found in service sectors and healthcare. Coming as it does, at the height of SWFL's tourist season, this type of disruption could pose serious worker shortages in hotels, airports, public transportation hubs, assisted living facilities and home health providers.

Several labor unions and faith communities have banded together to get the word out about this looming deadline in the hope that citizens will contact their representatives and demand action to repeal, or at least extend, this deadline. On December 7 a group of approximately 100 people from Fort Myers, Naples, and Miami attended the 19th weekly prayer vigil at the entrance of the South Florida Detention Center, often referred to as "Alligator Alcatraz". At the close of the service participants read the 30 articles of the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

About the Freedom Vigils. These vigils take place every Sunday afternoon with the goal of keeping public awareness on the horrific conditions within these detention centers. Since August these vigils have drawn international media attention with the support of the Workers Circle, SW Florida Interfaith Alliance, local trade unions and many other organizations and passionate individuals. There are often free buses that run from Fort Myers/Naples. To learn more about these vigils and the available transportation visit The Workers Circle Freedom Vigils.