

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 30, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
301 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas,

On June 12, 2022, the Administration lifted the pre-arrival COVID-19 testing requirement for all inbound international air travelers, a critical step to spur international business and leisure travel to the U.S. and support the economic recovery of our nation's travel and tourism industry. We also appreciate the Administration's efforts in March of this year to expand premium processing to certain nonimmigrant and employment-based visas. Ongoing insufficient visa processing operations, however, in conjunction with extended wait times for visa appointments, could undermine the economic, social, and diplomatic benefits of reopening inbound international travel.

To ensure international visitation can fully resume, we urge you to take steps to restore visa processing operations to pre-pandemic levels, reduce the backlog of appointments, and lower visa wait times as soon as possible. As of July 2022, average wait times for a visa appointment in the top 10 countries for inbound travel to the U.S. were more than 400 days, with many sites exceeding that average, including Guadalajara, Mexico (744 days) and Bogota, Colombia (746 days).<sup>1</sup>

Limited visa processing capacity and extended wait times discourage inbound travel, reduce visitor spending, and disrupt the reopening of American businesses. According to the U.S. Travel Association, international visitor spending in the U.S. for 2021 was still 78 percent below 2019 levels. As international and domestic travel begins to recover, many travel businesses rely on H-2B and J-1 visas to meet short-term and seasonal workforce demands that cannot otherwise be filled. With such a significant portion of U.S. visa processing sites facing extended wait times, travel businesses will not have the international visitors or the temporary workers they need to generate a speedy and robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> According to an analysis of State Department data by the U.S. Travel Association.  
<https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/visaprocessing-factsheet.pdf>

As we look to your leadership to help the country regain its footing, we ask that you consider the following recommendations to restore and improve visa processing:

- (1) Prioritize visa processing resources to the embassies and consulates that have a high demand for visas and historically facilitate the largest volume of inbound international travel to the U.S. (through B-1 and B-2 visas), including Mexico, Brazil, and India.
- (2) Lower visa processing wait times to an average of 10 to 15 days in the top countries for inbound travel to the U.S.
- (3) Develop a pilot program for the use of videoconferencing technology in visa interviews with low-risk visa applicants and visa applicants with urgent or time sensitive travel. Videoconferencing technology has advanced significantly in recent years and can adequately serve both the security and operational needs of visa processing.
- (4) Allow certain low-risk visa holders who are currently in the U.S. to renew their visa while staying in the U.S. Currently, many visa holders are required to exit the country before renewing their visas which adds inefficient and unnecessary barriers to renewal and contributes to increased wait times abroad.
- (5) Conduct group appointments for visa applicants seeking to visit the U.S. to participate in large international conventions, trade shows, meetings, or events.

These steps are needed to increase international business and leisure travel, restart student and cultural exchanges, strengthen our global leadership, and accelerate our nation's economic recovery. We urge you to include these recommendations in State Department treatment of visitor and worker visas while giving full consideration to homeland security priorities. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



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Dina Titus  
Member of Congress



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Gus M. Bilirakis  
Member of Congress



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Mark E. Amodei  
Member of Congress



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Jenniffer González-Colón  
Member of Congress



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Peter Welch  
Member of Congress



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John Katko  
Member of Congress



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Daniel T. Kildee  
Member of Congress



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Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress



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Vicente Gonzalez  
Member of Congress



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Ed Case  
Member of Congress



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Al Lawson  
Member of Congress



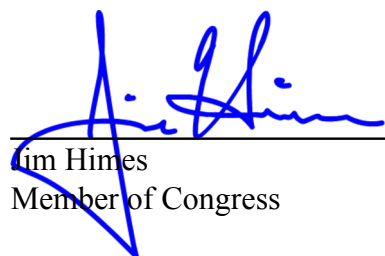
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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



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Steven Horsford  
Member of Congress



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Jim Himes  
Member of Congress



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James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



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Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress



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Scott H. Peters  
Member of Congress



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Tom Malinowski  
Member of Congress



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Cheri Bustos  
Member of Congress



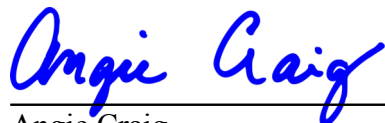
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Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress



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Carolyn B. Maloney  
Member of Congress



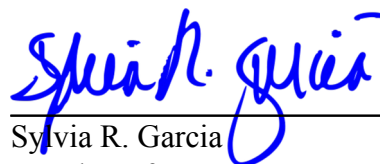
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Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



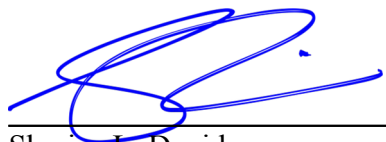
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Eric Swalwell  
Member of Congress



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Sylvia R. Garcia  
Member of Congress



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Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress




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Tom O'Halleran  
Member of Congress



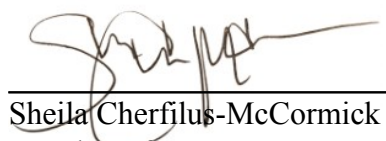
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Peter Meijer M.C.  
Member of Congress



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Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



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Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick  
Member of Congress



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Brian Fitzpatrick  
Member of Congress



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Ann McLane Kuster  
Member of Congress



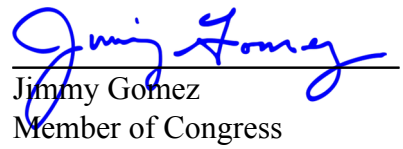
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Susie Lee  
Member of Congress



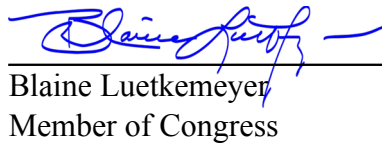
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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress



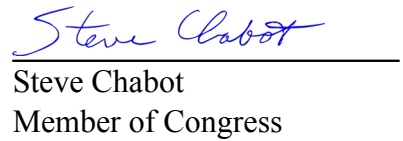
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Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress



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Blaine Luetkemeyer  
Member of Congress



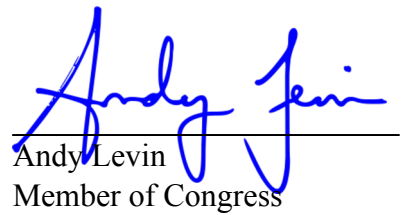
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Steve Chabot  
Member of Congress



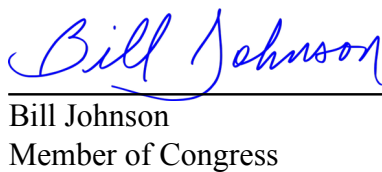
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Mike Kelly  
Member of Congress



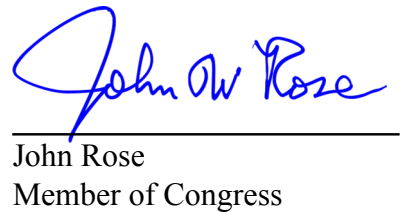
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Andy Levin  
Member of Congress



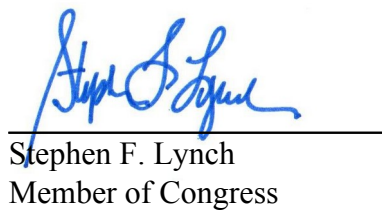
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Bill Johnson  
Member of Congress



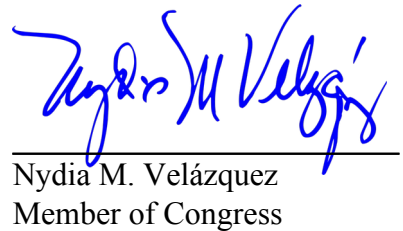
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John Rose  
Member of Congress



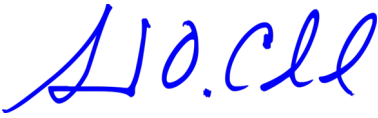
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Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



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Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress



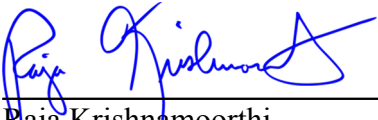
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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



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Troy Carter  
Member of Congress



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Raja Krishnamoorthi  
Member of Congress



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Andrew R. Garbarino  
Member of Congress



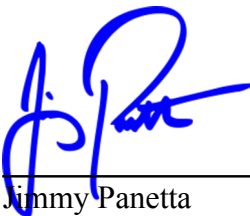
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Thomas R. Suozzi  
Member of Congress



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Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



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Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



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Stacey E. Plaskett  
Member of Congress



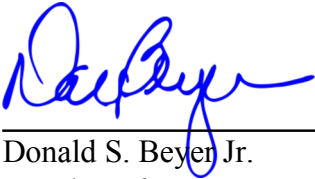
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Mike Levin  
Member of Congress



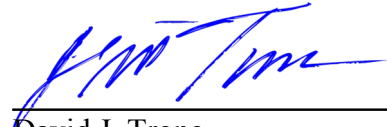
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Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



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Donald S. Beyer Jr.  
Member of Congress



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David J. Trone  
Member of Congress



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Joseph D. Morelle  
Member of Congress



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Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress



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Adam B. Schiff  
Member of Congress