

The Honorable Antony Blinken

Secretary

U.S. Department of State 2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

February 13, 2023

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We, the undersigned mayors, write to request your assistance on a critical issue that is affecting the cities and counties we lead. As a lingering result of the pandemic's peak, a severe backlog in the processing of U.S. visitor visas is now delaying — in some instances well over a year — the visitation of foreign travelers from key markets who provide much-needed economic and diplomatic benefits to the nation.

While the State Department has reduced processing times for certain visa categories, including students, seasonal workers and crewmembers, first-time visitor visa applicants in the largest countries for inbound travel are currently facing interview wait times of more than 400 days. We strongly urge you to take steps to lower these wait times for U.S. B-1 and B-2 visitor visas.

In 2019, 43% of international visitors — and \$120 billion in spending — came from countries where a visa is required to enter the United States. The U.S. Travel Association projects that if the current visa situation does not improve, American businesses will lose another 2.6 million potential visitors in 2023. This equates to \$5 billion in losses in 2022 and an additional \$7 billion in losses in 2023. Extreme delays are harming travel dependent businesses in our cities and counties. Very long wait times for visa interviews stifle local economies as we all strive to fully recover from the pandemic.

Due to the lack of prioritization of visitor visa categories, cities and counties are missing out on the opportunity to compete for millions of international visitors due to U.S. visa processing delays. Local economies lose because international business and leisure travelers spend more money on their trips to the United States than domestic travelers. And it's a loss for people in our communities whose loved ones can't attend important life events because they are being forced to wait close to a year or more to obtain visas.

In addition to the economic benefits that support jobs for workers in our communities, international inbound travel is a positive force for America's public diplomacy. When millions of travelers from around the world safely visit the United States, they return home with countless stories of the experiences that only America can provide.

Simply stated, we should take every step possible to accelerate the return of international travel to the United States. Improving visa processing times in top source markets will aid the economic recovery and position us to compete as a top destination for the global travelers that our cities desire to welcome.

We ask that you consider the following recommendations to improve visitor visa processing:

1. Set clear timelines to restore efficient visa processing. Lower wait times to 21 days in the top countries for inbound travel by April 2023.
2. By September 30, 2023, reinstate the Executive Order to provide interview appointments for 80% of nonimmigrant visa applicants within 21 days or less.

3. Increase consular staffing and resources in countries with a high volume of applicants and for large events in the U.S. that draw international visitors.
4. Extend interview waivers for nonimmigrant visa renewals and apply waivers more broadly to renewal applicants who are considered low risk through 2024.

From the progress that your agency has achieved in other visa classifications, it's clear that the State Department is capable of taking positive steps on visa issuance when it devotes adequate resources to swift and focused processing. We ask that you make international visitor visa processing a top priority and eliminate what is currently a major deterrent to tourism in the United States.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

ARIZONA

Mayor Jerry Bien-Willner
Town of Paradise Valley

Mayor Scott Blitz
Wellton

Mayor Kate Gallego
Phoenix

Mayor Douglas Nicholls
Yuma

Mayor Corey Woods
Tempe

CALIFORNIA

Mayor London Breed
San Francisco

Mayor Gleam Davis
Santa Monica

Mayor Sepi Shyne
West Hollywood

Mayor John B. Stephens
City of Costa Mesa

COLORADO

Mayor Michael Hancock
Denver

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Mayor Muriel Bowser
Washington

FLORIDA

Mayor Daniela Levine Cava
Miami-Dade County

Mayor Jerry L. Demings
Orange County

Mayor Buddy Dyer
Orlando

Mayor Anne Gerwig
Wellington

Mayor Josh Levy
Hollywood

Mayor Karen Lythgoe
Lantana

Mayor Betty Resch
Lake Worth Beach

Mayor Scott Singer
Boca Raton

Mayor Dean J. Trantalis
Fort Lauderdale

IOWA

Mayor Robert Gallagher
Bettendorf

ILLINOIS

Mayor Deborah Frank Feinen
Champaign

Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot
Chicago

Mayor Diane Wolfe Marlin
City of Urbana

Mayor Thomas McNamara
Rockford

Mayor Sangeetha Rayapati
Moline

INDIANA

Mayor Joseph Hogsett
Indianapolis

LOUISIANA

Mayor LaToya Cantrell
New Orleans

MISSOURI

Mayor Quinton Lucas
Kansas City

NORTH CAROLINA

Mayor Vi Lyles
Charlotte

NORTH DAKOTA

Mayor Timothy Mahoney
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Mayor Bruce Harrell
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