

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LEGISLATIVE ANALYST

DATE: November 15, 2022

TO: Honorable Members of the Rules, Elections, and Intergovernmental Relations Committee

FROM: Sharon M. ^{ISO} *Avak Keotahian - rg For* Chief Legislative Analyst Assignment No: 22-09-0553

SUBJECT: Los Angeles City Tourism Department 2023-2024 Legislative Proposals.

CLA RECOMMENDATION:

1. ADOPT the attached Resolutions recommending legislative positions for the 2023-2024 Federal Legislative Program, as submitted by the Los Angeles City Tourism Department (CTD), to support any legislative proposal that would modernize visa processing through the following means:
 - Authorize the State Department to test and broadly implement videoconferencing technology for visa interviews, to increase processing capacity and reduce wait times at embassies.
 - Provide permanent authorization for the State Department to broadly waive interviews for low risk B1/B2 visa renewals.
 - Authorization for multiple federal agencies to collect biometrics for visa applicants, which will eliminate the need for in-person appointments at U.S. embassies and consulates.

SUMMARY

The Mayor and Council President requested that City departments submit recommendations for legislation to be included in the 2023-2024 Federal and State Legislative Program. In response, the Los Angeles City Tourism Department CTD submitted a federal legislative proposal with three components for consideration. Our office recommends that Council support any legislative proposal with these elements.

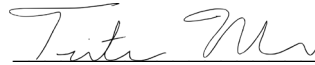
BACKGROUND

Employment levels in the leisure and hospitality industry, which encapsulates subsectors related to travel and tourism, fell significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic and have still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels. This sector is the fifth largest in Los Angeles County. International travelers contribute significantly to this industry.

Visitor visas generate nearly half of all inbound international travel and spending in the U.S. In 2019, 43% of international inbound travelers to the U.S. came from countries that require a visitor visa. These travelers accounted for 50% (\$120 billion) of the total international travel spending. Average wait-times for a visa interview from Mexico, Brazil, India, and Colombia rose to 442

days in July 2022, up from 419 days in May 2022. In 2019, 65% of inbound travelers with a visitor visa came from those four countries. At the current rate of visa processing, is estimated that international travel to the United States will not recover to 2019 levels until 2025.

CTD notes that the US Travel Association has recommended that federal legislation be developed to modernize visa processing. Specifically, CTD is recommending support for legislation that would: authorize the State Department to test and broadly implement videoconferencing technology; authorize multiple federal agencies to collect biometrics for visa applicants; and provide permanent authorization for the State Department to broadly waive interviews for low-risk B1/B2 visa renewals. The State Department has temporary emergency authority to waive visa interviews for broad categories of B1/B2 renewals. Each of these approaches would reduce the need for in-person appointments or interviews, which contribute to the long wait times.



Tristan Noack
Analyst

SMT:tcjn

Attachment: Resolutions

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Los Angeles, with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state, or federal governmental body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with the concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, before the COVID-19 pandemic, over half a million people in Los Angeles County were employed in jobs related to tourism; and

WHEREAS, employment in tourism-related industries fell swiftly and significantly, and has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels; and

WHEREAS, the recovery of these industries are largely dependent on the recovery of international travel to Los Angeles; and

WHEREAS, nearly half of the inbound international travel and spending in the United States is generated by visitors from countries that require a visitor visa; and

WHEREAS, visitor visa wait times are at record highs, with average wait times of over 440 days for applicants from the four largest inbound markets—Mexico, Brazil, India, and Colombia; and

WHEREAS, Los Angeles is one of the most popular destinations in the United States for international travelers; and

WHEREAS, legislation that improves visitor visa processing, particularly through means that would reduce the need for in-person interviews and appointments, would help the recovery and growth of tourism-related industries in Los Angeles;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its 2023-2024 Federal Legislative Program SUPPORT for any legislation that would modernize visitor visa processing, by: authorizing the State Department to test and broadly implement videoconferencing technology; authorizing multiple federal agencies to collect biometrics for visa applicants; and providing permanent authorization for the State Department to broadly waive interviews for low-risk B1/B2 visa renewals.