

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION®

November 21, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken

Secretary of State
Office of the Secretary
201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas

Secretary of Homeland Security
Office of the Secretary
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Mayorkas,

On behalf of the U.S. Travel Association (U.S. Travel), which represents all segments of America's travel industry, I strongly encourage the Department of State (DOS) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to extend interview waiver authorities for certain, low-risk nonimmigrant visa applications. The interview waiver authorities, which expire on December 31, 2023, help lower nonimmigrant visa wait times, facilitate additional international visitation to the U.S., and benefit businesses and workers in America's travel industry – all without compromising national security. Conversely, allowing these authorities to expire could cost U.S. businesses another \$7 billion in foreign visitor spending and significantly increase wait times for nearly one-third of visa applicants in 2024.

U.S. Travel's mission is to increase travel to and within the United States. One of U.S. Travel's top priorities is to lower visa wait times to help facilitate additional international visitation. According to an analysis by Tourism Economics, in 2023, long visa wait times cost American travel businesses \$7 billion in foreign visitor spending. Currently, the average wait times for a visitor visa interview is 175 days – while wait times in some of the top inbound markets are more than one year. If the interview waiver authorities are allowed to expire, this problem will only get worse and the economic costs will only increase in 2024 and beyond.

The interview waiver authorities give consular officers the discretion to waive in-person interviews for certain low-risk nonimmigrant visa applications. These waivers have helped the Biden Administration lower visa wait times, increase nonimmigrant visa issuance, and reduce the pandemic-era backlog that has negatively impacted the travel industry.

Importantly, the waivers do not negatively impact national security. Eligible applicants have visited the United States previously and are still subject to the same strenuous background checks and screening that all nonimmigrants receive. Additionally, the consulate officers have the discretion to issue the waiver or to require an in-person interview on a case-by-case basis.

The travel industry is grateful to the Biden Administration for previously issuing the waiver authorities and we urge you to extend it immediately. Extending the waivers will help reduce the consistently long visa interview wait times and support America's economic growth and competitiveness. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with the Biden Administration to increase travel to and within the United States.

Sincerely,



Geoff Freeman
President and CEO
U.S. Travel Association