

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

July 17, 2017

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

As key stakeholders in the travel industry, we are writing to raise concerns about Executive Order 13802 issued on June 21, 2017. The order amended Executive Order 13597 (*Establishing Visa and Foreign Visitor Processing Goals and the Task Force on Travel and Competitiveness*) in a manner that eliminated a Department of State policy to ensure that 80 percent of nonimmigrant visa applicants are interviewed within three weeks of submitting a visa application. We are concerned that the removal of this provision will negatively impact consular affairs operations, and the timely processing of visas for prospective travelers.

We strongly support thorough efforts to ensure international visitors are not entering the U.S. with the intent to overstay their visas, or to commit acts of terrorism or other crimes. We also support a world class and efficient visa process that effectively and securely manages the millions of visa applications submitted each year. After years of needless visa backlogs, the State Department has made great progress, reducing inefficiencies to decrease wait times to manageable levels.

It is important to maintain these improvements because visa processing delays have a direct economic impact on the United States and American jobs. In 2016, the U.S. travel industry generated \$2.3 trillion in economic output, supporting 15.3 million jobs and \$248.2 billion in wages. Approximately 2.7 percent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) is attributed to travel and tourism, with 1 out of 9 jobs depending on the travel and tourism industry.

We request that you reconsider this new order, and review the possible economic ramifications of this significant policy change. In addition, we ask that the implementation plan be modified to contain a strong statement that it is the desire of the U.S. government to maintain efficient and timely visa processing for legitimate travelers, and that timely and effective visa processing remains a cornerstone of the Department of State's consular affairs operations.

We also urge the White House to work with the State Department, the Office of Management and Budget, and Congress to ensure that consular office operations are adequately staffed to handle visa workloads, and implement new and future protocols. Furthermore, with the State Department's focus on increased scrutiny of visa applicants, the Administration should consider lifting any hiring freeze policies at the Department of State. Trained personnel are necessary to review visa applications, and ensure that potential visitors do not pose a threat to national security. The State Department's revenue from visa fees covers the costs associated with employing U.S. consular officers. The State Department should have minimal budgetary concerns regarding hiring new officers to meet likely workload increases.

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Thank you for considering our concerns. We look forward to working with you on policies that will encourage travel to the United States – keeping America closed to terrorism, but open for business.

Sincerely,

U.S. Travel Association
American Bus Association
American Gaming Association
American Hotel & Lodging Association
American Society of Association Executives
American Society of Travel Agents
Business Travel Coalition
Events Industry Council
International Association of Exhibitions and Events
International Franchise Association
International Inbound Travel Association
Meetings Professionals International (MPI)
National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers
National Retail Federation
National Tour Association
Professional Convention Management Association
Society of Independent Show Organizers
Student & Youth Travel Association (SYTA)
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
United States Tour Operators Association

CC: Secretary Rex Tillerson, U.S. Department of State
Secretary John Kelly, U.S. Department of Homeland Security