

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION*

Senator Marco Rubio

Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on
Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Ben Cardin

Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on
Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rubio and Ranking Member Cardin:

On behalf of Florida's and Maryland's travel and tourism industries, thank you for your work to provide relief to America's small enterprises through this public health and economic crisis. As you negotiate the next phase of coronavirus response legislation, we ask that eligibility for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP)—or any subsequent small enterprise relief program—include destination marketing organizations (DMOs), regardless of employee count or tax structure.

The mission of DMOs, which include convention and visitors bureaus, is to drive demand for businesses, attractions and visitor experiences and attract events that generate economic activity, such as trade shows and conventions. However, these organizations are largely dependent on travel tax-related revenue, a funding source that has evaporated amid the pandemic, forcing DMOs to lay off staff and jeopardizing their mission of economic development.

Unless Congress acts now to include these economically vital organizations in the PPP, DMOs will be sidelined in America's recovery efforts, threatening the revival of our states' travel industries, small businesses and workforces.

As part of their economic development mission, DMOs of all sizes direct resources to promote small businesses—which make up 83% of all travel businesses—that otherwise do not have the means to market themselves. If DMOs continue to be excluded from the PPP, many will be forced to permanently close because their bylaws prohibit taking on loans or debt. For others that are forced to take on loans to stay afloat, every dollar that's spent repaying those loans over the next few years will be one dollar less that's spent on supporting small businesses, prolonging America's economic recovery.

Unfortunately, no city in America—small or large, rural or urban—has been spared from the economic pain of the pandemic. At the same time, virtually all DMOs were excluded from the PPP. The next phase of legislation should, accordingly, allow for all DMOs—regardless of size, revenue, or structure—to qualify for the PPP and have access to sufficient relief.

For example, DMOs in Maryland and Florida are organized as either quasi-governmental or nonprofit entities. Prior to the pandemic, our states' DMOs ranged in size from 25-300 full-time employees and each generated between \$250,000-\$90 million for local economies through travel-related taxes—a revenue source that is no longer viable. All DMOs—regardless of size—play an indispensable role in driving demand to small businesses and spurring economic growth and should be eligible for much-needed relief.

Importantly, if there is a transition to another small enterprise relief program, DMOs will first need access to the PPP.

Small businesses give our states character and keep visitors coming back year after year. These are the very businesses the PPP sought to protect, and Congress can ensure their survival by providing a lifeline to DMOs. We thank you for all that you are doing to support Florida's and Maryland's travel industries and America's overall recovery efforts.

Signed,

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