

U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION®

December 22, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20528

RECEIVED

By ESEC at 1:53 pm, Dec 29, 2021

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

On behalf of the U.S. travel and tourism industry, which includes countless small businesses that depend on temporary seasonal workers, thank you for your December 20, 2021, announcement that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will release 22,000 supplemental H-2B visas. These supplemental visas will help many travel businesses meet their workforce needs during a critical year for the industry's economic recovery. However, given the historic workforce shortages in the travel industry and demand for H-2B visas that significantly outstrips supply, we respectfully urge DHS to release additional supplemental H-2B visas—beyond those recently announced—to ensure that travel businesses can avoid further revenue loss, capacity constraints, and customer service disruptions caused by workforce shortages.

The travel industry is facing extreme workforce shortages that threaten to delay economic recovery. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the industry has amassed cumulative economic losses totaling \$723 billion (January 2020-October 2021). In 2020, direct travel jobs in the U.S., on average, fell from 9 million jobs in 2019 to 6 million—a 34% decline.

As the industry strives to recover, travel businesses across the country are struggling to find full-time and temporary seasonal labor to meet customer demand. Last summer, the lack of H-2B workers forced many seasonal travel and tourism employers to turn away customers, scale back service and cancel planned capital equipment purchases. This was a significant setback for the industry's economic recovery and caused further hardships for small travel businesses that had already suffered historic losses.

Since last summer, the workforce challenges have only gotten worse. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are now 1.8 million job openings in the leisure and hospitality sector, which represents one-in-six of all job openings. In October, accommodations, which are heavily reliant on temporary and seasonal workers, experienced the largest increase in job openings (+254,000). The H-2B program is essential to tourism and hospitality employers who are challenged to find local temporary workers to fill job openings.

The release of 22,000 supplemental H-2B visas will help travel and tourism businesses meet their temporary worker needs, but additional supplemental visas are needed to sustain an even recovery across all sectors of travel. Demand for H-2B visas significantly outpaces the supply, indicating extreme workforce demands. In January 2021, the Department of Labor's Office of Foreign Labor Certification received applications from 5,377 businesses requesting 96,641 worker positions for 33,000 available visas. Applications require proof that employers have tried to fill positions with American workers but are unable to do so, indicating more visas are needed to meet hiring demands.

With these needs in mind, we respectfully request you exercise your full authority to release supplemental H-2B visas in conjunction with the second half Fiscal Year 2022 filing period which begins January 1, 2022. Unless the U.S. Department of Homeland Security exercises its full authority to issue additional H-2B visas, nearly two-thirds of needed seasonal jobs will remain vacant during a critical period of economic recovery.

On behalf of the entire U.S. travel industry, we thank you again for releasing these supplemental H-2B visas, and for your attention to this critical issue. We look forward to continuing our work alongside the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to find solutions to the workforce challenges facing our country and our industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Dow", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Roger J. Dow
President and CEO
U.S. Travel Association



**U.S. Citizenship
and Immigration
Services**

January 12, 2022

Roger J. Dow
President and CEO
U.S. Travel Association
1100 New York Avenue Northwest
Suite 450
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Dow:

Thank you for your December 22, 2021 letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Secretary Mayorkas asked that I respond on his behalf.

In your letter, you emphasize the importance of the H-2B Temporary Nonagricultural Worker Program for the U.S. travel and tourism industry and express appreciation for DHS's December 20, 2021 announcement regarding 20,000 supplemental H-2B visas that will be made available for U.S. employers seeking to employ additional workers on or before March 31, 2022. Your letter urges DHS to release additional supplemental H-2B visas beyond those described in the announcement.

DHS appreciates the concerns you raised regarding the challenges faced by the U.S. travel and tourism industry, the historic economic losses it has suffered since the beginning of the pandemic, and the need for H-2B nonimmigrant labor for small businesses and other employers in the industry. DHS is taking action to ensure that American businesses are equipped with the resources needed to recover successfully and contribute to the economic health of local communities.

As you noted, on December 20, 2021, DHS announced a supplemental increase of 20,000 visas for the H-2B program for U.S. employers seeking to employ additional workers on or before March 31, 2022. Should Congress provide further authority for DHS to allocate supplemental H-2B visas, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), in consultation with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), will assess the necessity of making available such additional visas. As in prior years, DHS consulted with DOL to assess labor demands and balance the interest of U.S. workers. The additional visas will be made available in the coming weeks via a temporary final rule in the *Federal Register*. We are mindful of the time sensitivity and are working to promulgate the rule with due urgency.

Please also note that USCIS continues to accept H-2B petitions that are exempt from the congressionally mandated cap. These include, among others, petitions for current H-2B workers in the United States who wish to extend their stay and, if applicable, change the terms of their employment or change their employers.

Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue. Should you require any additional assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ur M. Jaddou". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ur M. Jaddou
Director