

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 11, 2021

Mr. Matthew Lussenhop
Acting Assistant Secretary
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
Department of State
2201 C. Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Acting Assistant Secretary Lussenhop:

We write to inquire about the issuance of J-1 BridgeUSA visas for the upcoming summer season. We have heard from Maine businesses that very few prospective participants in the Summer Work Travel (SWT) and Camp Counselor programs have secured appointments for visa interviews, an issue of increasing urgency as the summer nears. We ask you to consider the cultural and economic importance of these visas and urge you to process these applications in a timely manner.

Not only does the J-1 program offer cultural benefits, but it also supports local economies. Maine businesses tell us that the pent up desire to travel to the state is high. In fact, our hospitality industry and summer youth camps expect a summer season similar to 2019, not 2020. As you know, J-1 BridgeUSA programs help to support and supplement workers at seasonal businesses and camps. As travel resumes, these vital programs will strengthen our tourism and youth camp economy in Maine and other parts of our country.

We understand the ongoing challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic and the backlog our embassies and consulates face. There is no doubt that our diplomats continue to work hard under extraordinary circumstances and we are appreciative of their dedication to the Department. That is why we suggest you broadly waive the personal appearance requirement for returning participants whose visa expired within 48 months. This option already exists for several other visa categories, per Secretary Blinken's policy updated on March 11th, and would help ensure that some SWT and Camp Counselor participants are able to secure visas and assist with the economic recovery so needed in our seasonal communities.

We hope you will consider our request to process these J-1 visas and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress