



New York State
**HOSPITALITY
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The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write as the American businesses, U.S. Department of State designated program sponsors, and trade associations that host, recruit, support, and rely on J-1 BridgeUSA programs, which in a typical year would bring more than 300,000 international students and professionals to the U.S. to study, work, travel, intern, train, and participate in cultural exchange. We were encouraged that you allowed Presidential Proclamation 10052, which had paused the issuance of most J-1 visas, to expire on March 31st. However even with the Proclamation no longer in effect, U.S. embassies and consulates are providing few, if any, J-1 visa applicant interviews, bringing the future of these valuable cultural exchange programs into question.

We are facing a crisis. Without decisive and timely action from our consular posts in April, we face long-term damage to BridgeUSA programs, U.S. public diplomacy, and the businesses across the country that rely on exchange visitors to provide a small but critical supplement to their seasonal workforce. In a 2020 [survey](#) of 659 seasonal businesses and camps nationwide, half shortened their season or hours, and one in seven laid off or furloughed full time Americans as a direct result of not being able to bring exchange visitors in to fill positions, even during a period of high nationwide unemployment. These same businesses, nearly all in the tourism and hospitality sectors hard-hit by the pandemic, are anticipating and need a strong recovery season in 2021, one that will remain out of reach if staffing cannot be secured. Currently businesses are reporting that American workers are substantially less interested in these seasonal positions than they have been in the past.

As we look ahead to the economic recovery of our country, Americans also look forward to a return to family-focused leisure activities, especially those providing the social and emotional learning for children long deprived of in-person interaction. Summer camps, amusement parks, and national park concessionaires all rely on J-1 exchange visitors to supplement their workforce. The positions filled by exchange visitors are by regulation seasonal, temporary, and do not displace American workers. They rather *support* year-round American employment in seasonal communities with small year-round populations.

We urge you to direct the Department of State to immediately take the following actions:

- 1. Add J-1 cultural exchange applicants to the Department of State's national interest priorities.**
- 2. Waive personal appearance for returning participants from program years 2019 and 2020 applying in the same category (an option already available for F-1 and several other visa categories).**

Since the Fulbright-Hays Act in 1961, BridgeUSA programs have operated through a public-private partnership. Summer Work Travel, Camp Counselor, and Au Pair operate at no cost to U.S. taxpayers: program sponsors receive no federal funding and rely on participant fees to support their work. Over the past year, these program

sponsors have received virtually no revenue. Thousands of jobs have been lost in this sector, along with experienced program staff who held those positions. A second year without revenue will mean that many of these sponsors will go out of business, decimating the infrastructure that supports these valuable and broad-reaching public diplomacy programs.

Without your timely action, we fear for the long-term viability of BridgeUSA programs.

We recognize that the pandemic will continue to pose challenges for international exchange programs. We believe these small steps will help boost economic recovery for seasonal businesses and camps, and ensure the longevity of BridgeUSA programs.

Sincerely,

Mark Dorr
New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association (NYSH&TA)
President