

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our urgent concern for the thousands of Americans and lawful permanent residents still stranded overseas due to travel restrictions related to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). We understand that efforts to return to the United States have been complicated by a lack of commercial flight options, national travel prohibitions, closed borders and airspace, and escalating costs, among other challenging factors. We urge you to provide disaggregated data on the number of stranded Americans and lawful permanent residents, centralize available information, coordinate with other agencies, and provide repatriation flights if commercial options are unavailable.

At the time of writing, the State Department reports that it has coordinated the repatriation of over 45,000 Americans from 78 countries since January 29, 2020, while estimating that an additional 24,000 Americans still seek to return home. More specific data is essential to assess how many people require repatriation and ensure necessary resources. We ask that you provide the most up-to-date data on the number of Americans and lawful permanent residents unable to return home at this time, disaggregated by country, and encourage you to implement initiatives beyond the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program to track and report this data if necessary.

We are alarmed by reports that Americans and lawful permanent residents abroad are receiving conflicting guidance from embassy officials. Given the rapid implementation of travel restrictions and difficulties securing aviation permissions, the Department must immediately centralize and standardize guidance on how to return home while exerting maximum diplomatic pressure in negotiating with foreign governments to ensure flight access and assistance for all Americans. Additionally, the State Department should provide assistance to Americans and lawful permanent residents who may be subject to in-country travel restrictions that prevent them from traveling to an airport to return to the United States.

Where commercial flight options are no longer available, we encourage and support further cooperation with the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security to repatriate Americans and lawful permanent residents using government aircraft. We were pleased to see that you secured support from the U.S. Transportation Command in navigating the complexities of this extraordinary situation and encourage you to continue to leverage the logistical expertise and network of other agencies.

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We are pleased that the State Department has chartered over a dozen flights to repatriate Americans and lawful permanent residents, and urge you to ensure such options continue. But many of Americans and lawful permanent residents had already incurred thousands of dollars in unexpected costs as they sought commercial options at skyrocketing prices, or paid significant sums for transportation to international hubs, while navigating a rapidly evolving situation that is no fault of their own. We request additional information regarding additional authorities or resources that may be necessary to provide financial relief and waive fees for transportation provided by the State Department repatriation Task Force, including transportation facilitated and provided by the Department of Defense. We further urge you to coordinate with other nations that are also repatriating citizens from countries where Americans are currently stranded.

Thank you for your urgent assistance, and we look forward to working with you to provide any additional authorities or funding you may require in order to ensure the timely and safe repatriation of all Americans and lawful permanent residents globally.

Sincerely,


RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate


SHERROD BROWN
United States Senate

/s/ ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
United States Senate


CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO
United States Senate


EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senate


ELIZABETH WARREN
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KAMALA D. HARRIS
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/s/ JACKY ROSEN
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