



May 2, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today with an urgent request that your administration take necessary steps immediately to ensure a timely, sufficient and smooth process for J-1 Visas for BridgeUSA program participants. BridgeUSA Programs are private sector components of the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP) established by the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (The Fulbright-Hays Act). BridgeUSA programs are administered by the Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs within the Department of State and include the Summer Work Travel (SWT), Au Pair, Camp Counselor, Intern and Trainee categories among others. These programs provide invaluable cross-cultural experiences for young people from abroad and the Americans they interact with during their programs. They are also vital to the economic, public diplomacy and foreign policy interests of the United States at little to no cost to the American taxpayer.

The SWT and Camp Counselor programs are time sensitive programs linked to peak seasonal economies in iconic American tourist and rural destinations. Due to the pandemic, in comparison to 2019, participation in these programs decreased by 96 percent in 2020, and by 75 percent in 2021.

For these valuable programs to function this year, we request that uniform guidance be issued directing our embassies and consulates make timely visa interview appointments available to J-1 Visa applicants in adequate volume, to waive in-person interviews when reasonable, and not place limitations on the numbers of applicants that can be processed below comparable 2019 levels. After two years, the program, participants, hosts and sponsor community cannot sustain another year of delays and limitations without causing irreparable harm to the image of the program, reputation of the United States, and further economic damage to U.S. businesses and camps across the country. The timeline is crucial, and we ask that you issue this guidance as soon as possible.

The BridgeUSA programs are cultural exchange programs with participants from [200 countries and territories](#) that also provide numerous seasonal businesses with a small but critical supplement to their local staff during their peak seasons. In fact, BridgeUSA work-based public

diplomacy programs typically contribute over [half a billion dollars](#) to the United States economy annually. Seasonal businesses have a short window to generate much of their annual revenues, which in turn support the local, year-round workforce. Additionally, the seasonal communities are enriched by the diversity of the workforce, which adds tremendous economic and cultural value to the regions. During a recent survey of summer camps and seasonal businesses, 95 percent said that these programs enable U.S. based staff to gain a better understanding of other cultures, and 92 percent said they make the community more sensitive to other cultures. SWT and Camp Counselor participants not only work in local businesses, but also shop in our stores, eat in our restaurants, rent local accommodations, and also spend money traveling to visit other cities and attractions across the U.S. All of this contributes to vital economic growth and enriched cultural diversity in areas that are dependent on a supplemental workforce.

Many communities in our area rely on BridgeUSA participants visiting the U.S. for cultural exchange, and we are concerned that the present restrictions on or lack of interview capacity at U.S. Embassies in many countries will leave young people around the world with the impression that the United States is an unwelcoming place. With your assistance, we can influence the world in a very positive manner by sharing our American culture with BridgeUSA Exchange Visitors while also ensuring that our businesses are able to fully staff for the coming summer and winter seasons, hastening long-needed economic recovery in our communities.

Please feel free to reach out to Adam Crepeau at (603) 271-2121 or adam.j.crepeau@nh.gov or Joe Marro at (207) 620-0177 or joseph.marro@maine.gov to discuss further or if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Governor Christopher T. Sununu
State of New Hampshire



Governor Janet T. Mills
State of Maine



Governor Spencer J. Cox
State of Utah