

Template Letter to Ambassadors – BridgeUSA and Consular

Dear Ambassador _____,

My business, [[International Travel Company]], is an international representative for U.S. Department of State J-1 BridgeUSA programs, which was created by the Fulbright-Hays Act in 1961 to increase mutual understanding between Americans and the people of other countries. We work with U.S.-based Department of State designated sponsor organizations and are responsible for recruiting and vetting participants for these valuable public diplomacy programs.

On behalf of the thousands of students and young people from our country who participate in BridgeUSA programs, I am writing to ask that you implore President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken to immediately revoke Presidential Proclamation 10052, and to open up visa appointments for J-1 BridgeUSA participants at local consular offices.

The BridgeUSA J-1 Visa program is uniquely different from the other non-immigrant visa programs contained in President Trump's Proclamation 10052 in that it is, first and foremost, a cultural exchange program with significant cultural exchange requirements for both participants and hosts. While it has a work component, the work alone is not the goal, rather it is the means by which the international participants can travel to the United States and learn about American culture and values. Most of the students I work with would not be able to afford to spend significant time in the U.S. without this program, as the costs of a semester at a U.S. university is far out of reach. These students represent the best and brightest of our country: they study engineering, medicine, economics, and law, and living on their own in a foreign country allows them to develop the independence and fortitude that will serve them well throughout their careers. They return to our country with greatly improved English and new professional opportunities as a result.

Failing to revoke Presidential Proclamation 10052 immediately places these soft diplomacy programs at existential risk because both participants and hosts cannot properly plan for the surge resort season, summer camp, and childcare timelines these programs support. Further, failing to prioritize the processing of these J-1 visas has the same effect as the delays incurred so far and cannot be overcome without immediate prioritization. Many of the programs by regulation take place between May and September. Further delays will also cause additional economic stress on my business, which has already been hard hit by the pandemic.

I ask you, Ambassador, to work with your colleagues in Washington to ensure that Presidential Proclamation 10052 is revoked immediately, and that the processing of BridgeUSA program J-1 visa applications start again to allow our students to travel for the summer 2021 season. As our country starts to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, we will need stronger ties with the United States and greater opportunities for our young people. BridgeUSA programs are a cornerstone of both goals and require your immediate action.