



BritishAmericanBusiness

Registered office:
Finsgate, 5-7 Cranwood Street, London, EC1V 9EE
Tel: 020 7290 9888

52 Vanderbilt Avenue 20th Floor, New York, NY 10017
Tel: 212 661 4060

Website: www.babinc.org

Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C

Tuesday July 6th 2021

Letter regarding short- and long-term challenges in obtaining and renewing visas for work related visits and working in the United States

Dear Mr. Secretary

I am writing to ask you for guidance that I can pass on to the members of BritishAmerican Business about the short- and long-term challenges in obtaining and renewing visas for work related visits and working in the United States (U.S.).

About BritishAmerican Business (BAB)

BAB is the leading transatlantic trade organization, representing 400 member companies from the UK, U.S. and elsewhere, all of whom do business in and between the UK and the U.S. BAB is a pro-trade, pro-business body and is the official affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in the UK (as the AmCham in the UK) and of the British Chambers of Commerce in the U.S.

The value of trade and investment between the U.S. and the UK

The U.S.-UK economic corridor is one of the most important anywhere in the world. The trade in goods and services between the two countries is worth over \$270 bn annually and the scale of capital invested by companies across the Atlantic is a key component of what binds the two countries together so closely. This corridor supports millions of jobs in both countries and billions of dollars of annual investment. The ability for businesspeople to work in, and travel between, the two countries is crucial to the success of this relationship.

The challenge of obtaining and renewing a business visa

Throughout the last 15 months, members of BAB have raised concerns about their ability to obtain and renew visas for employees that would have historically been routine. We have received an increasing number of reports that appointments for interviews at consulates and embassies around the world are either cancelled or unavailable and travel restrictions mean that leaving the U.S. for an interview risks not being able to return. This situation is now becoming a critical issue for many U.S. and UK companies with employees working in the U.S. under various business visas. These companies and employees do not want to risk legal jeopardy but need to be able to renew their visas and travel internationally to fulfill their business obligations.

Business travelers from the UK welcomed the opportunity to apply for a National Interest Exception to allow them to travel but we hear that visa appointments are being linked to these waivers when they should not be connected.

Our members understand the initial challenges of operating under COVID-19 restrictions may have temporarily impacted productivity in embassies and consulates but would like reassurance that these issues are being addressed as they have been in private business.

We would be grateful for any guidance you can give us on a) when consular services around the world will be back to the normal level of service and b) what advice we can pass on to those inside the U.S. whose visas are expiring and are unable to obtain the necessary appointments to renew them.

Removing travel restrictions

The situation is complicated further by the 212F restrictions which prohibit non-permanent U.S. residents who have been in the UK from directly entering the U.S. and these restrictions also affect UK citizens, legally working in the U.S. on visas, from returning to their jobs and homes if they have to leave the country for any reason.

BAB has been arguing for a removal of the 212F travel restrictions in a safe manner and would like to ask for your support to have the U.S.-UK Travel Task Force present a clear path toward re-opening as soon as possible. What might have made sense 15 months ago looks outdated now given the success of vaccination programs and the huge advances in therapeutics for this disease. The U.S. government has recognized this, and the safety of air travel, by removing restrictions for its own citizens. Treating vaccinated UK citizens exactly the same way as U.S. citizens would be helpful and a reflection of the great success that both countries have made of their vaccination programs.

U.S. policy toward labor mobility

Finally, we would like to ask for your long-term commitment to a resumption of historic levels of availability of short- and long-term business-related visas. BAB see this issue as completely separate to the broader U.S. immigration policy and as a crucial component of the U.S.'s position as a globally competitive and innovative economy. Ideally, we would argue for an enhanced labor mobility arrangement between the U.S. and the UK as the closest of allies and business partners but a return to the status quo ante is the minimum that our members would expect. Once again, we would appreciate any guidance you are able to give us on this point.

Mr. Secretary, we appreciate your attention to this letter and are available to engage with your team on these issues and any questions that may arise as part of the follow up.

Sincerely,



Duncan Edwards
Chief Executive Officer
BritishAmerican Business