



December 14, 2021

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Cantwell and Ranking Member Wicker:

I am writing on behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 160,000 Americans who work at travel agencies across the country to share our policy priorities in advance of the Committee's markup of S. 3375, the Omnibus Travel and Tourism Act. While not addressed specifically in the legislation, we urge you to consider the unique experiences of travel agencies throughout the pandemic.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 98 percent of travel agencies in this country are small businesses under the U.S. Small Business Administration's size standards, and over two-thirds of them are owned and operated by women. At last count, there were nearly 15,000 retail locations in the U.S., employing over 108,000 people, plus an additional 60,000 self-employed travel advisors working as independent contractors.

As a result of COVID-19 and the governmental response to it, the travel agency business came to an almost complete halt, and recovery has been painfully slow – with average revenue levels still down 71 percent compared to 2019 according to ASTA member surveys. Even factoring in the relief programs created by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136) and successor legislation, the average travel agency has laid more than 40 percent of its staff. As relief programs run dry, it is deeply frustrating to our nation's small businesses that Congress continues to kick the can down the road when they are facing existential business challenges entirely outside of their control.

Government action – here and abroad – has played a key role in this catastrophe. We understand that our country is coming out of the worst public health crisis in history, and understand as well the rationale behind these government restrictions. That said, we believe the government has a responsibility to provide some level of support to those businesses harmed by its response to COVID-19. Sadly, financial support for the travel industry has been uneven so far, especially with regard to less visible sectors of the industry like travel agencies.

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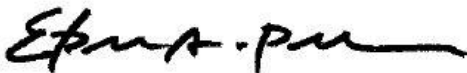
ASTA.org TravelSense.org

While we are supportive of initiatives to study the impact of the pandemic on the travel industry and to promote inbound international travel to the U.S., we fear that without additional support from Congress the very future of our part of the travel industry and all manner of travel-reliant small businesses is at risk. While acknowledging that some items are outside of the committee's jurisdiction, we respectfully request the committee's support for the following as it considers ways to support the travel industry:

- **Extend ERTC and Target Relief Toward Hardest-Hit Industries** – The Employee Retention Tax Credit (ERTC), created by the CARES Act and subsequently extended, provided a refundable tax credit of up to \$7,000 per employee per quarter for businesses whose revenue has been reduced by at least 20 percent as compared to 2019. However, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (P.L. 117-58) moved up the ERTC's expiration date by one quarter, from December 31 to September 30, 2021. With Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) funds running dry, many agencies were counting on ERTC support to help them get through the fourth quarter. As such, we believe that the ERTC should not only be restored in the fourth quarter of 2021, but should be extended into 2022 and targeted toward those businesses who suffered at least a 50 percent revenue loss in 2020 and 2021, with extra benefits on a sliding scale for those suffering a 75 percent loss. There is standalone legislation in the House – H.R.6161 – to restore the credit for the fourth quarter.
- **SAVE Act (H.R. 2120)** – Introduced by Reps. Mark Amodei (R-NV), Charlie Crist (D-FL), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) and Dina Titus (D-NV), the Securing Access for Venue Equity (SAVE) Act (H.R. 2120) would make travel agencies and other hard-hit businesses eligible for the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant (SVOG) program, which was established by the Continuing Appropriations Act (CAA) at the end of 2020. Under this program, eligible applicants can qualify for grants of up to \$10 million equal to 45 percent of their 2019 gross revenue. We are fully aware that the SVOG encountered challenges upon its launch earlier this year, that its funding is running low and that the size and scope of future relief legislation is uncertain. That said, H.R. 2120 is the only pending legislation that would provide direct support to travel agencies during our time of need.

Thank you for considering our views on these critical issues. If you have any questions about this or any issue related to the travel and tourism industry, please don't hesitate to contact me at (703) 739-6842 or epeck@asta.org.

Yours Sincerely,



Eben Peck
Executive Vice President, Advocacy
American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA)