



October 2, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

I write on behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 140,000 Americans who work at travel agencies across the country as Congress continues negotiations over coronavirus (COVID-19) relief legislation to request immediate assistance to help our member companies survive and recover from the catastrophic impact of this crisis.

In normal times, travel agencies – online, “brick and mortar” and many hybrid business models in between – play a critical role in the U.S. travel and tourism industry. In 2019, travel agencies sold the majority of airline tickets in the U.S. – close to 830,000 air tickets *per day* in 2019 – two-thirds of cruises and 68 percent of tour packages. According to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau, there are close to 15,000 retail travel agency locations in the U.S. – in every state and Congressional district – employing over 108,000 people, plus an additional 40,000 self-employed travel advisors. The vast majority of these businesses (98 percent) are small according to the Small Business Administration’s size standards, and over two-thirds of them are owned and operated by women.

Due to COVID-19, starting in March this business (and any revenue associated with it) has come to an almost complete halt. As a result, according to member surveys, more than 9 in 10 travel agencies’ business income is down at least 75 percent compared to 2019. Further, even factoring in the relief programs created by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116-136), close to 64 percent of travel agencies surveyed have laid off at least half their staff. All told, 73 percent of ASTA members predict they will be out of business in six months or less if current conditions hold and additional federal relief is not provided. This would leave the traveling public without access to the critical services travel advisors provide to consumers and travel suppliers’ main distribution channel crippled.

While we understand that many industries are facing critical challenges right now, we view the scenario described above as unacceptable. To prevent it, we respectfully submit our requests to Congress for the next round of COVID-19 relief, some specific to travel and some relating to general support for U.S. businesses, as follows:

- **Inclusion of Ticket Agents in Airline Payroll Support Program** – A broad array of airline stakeholders supports an extension of Section 4112 of the CARES Act, which authorized the Department of the Treasury to provide \$32 billion in payroll support payments to air carriers and certain contractors, past its September

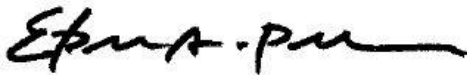
30, 2020 expiration date. ASTA supports such an extension as well, but requests that Section 4112 be amended to include travel agencies as well given the critical role they play in our country's commercial aviation system the broader travel industry. The most straightforward way to do this is to amend the Payroll Support Program's "Definitions" section (Section 4111 of the CARES Act) to include "ticket agents" – the statutory term for travel agencies, as defined in section 40102 of Title 49, United States Code.

- **RESTART Act (S. 3814/H.R. 7481)** – The Reviving the Economy Sustainably Towards a Recovery in Twenty-Two (RESTART) Act would create a new forgivable loan program to provide funding to small and mid-sized businesses to cover six months of payroll, benefits, and fixed operating expenses for businesses that have taken a substantial revenue hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. A share of the loan will be forgiven based on the revenue losses suffered by the business in 2020 with the remainder to be repaid over seven years. The bipartisan RESTART Act addresses several of ASTA's main concerns about the CARES Act's relief programs, namely that they provide inadequate relief to companies with more than 500 employees and that they make no accommodation for industries hit the hardest by the crisis, as travel has been. If the bill cannot be incorporated whole cloth into the next COVID relief bill, we request that as many of its elements as possible be added as a complement to or part of any Paycheck Protection Program extension, especially its provisions providing support to businesses with more than 500 employees.
- **Continued Assistance to Unemployed Workers** – As you know, the CARES Act authorized extra unemployment payments, increased standard benefit amounts and broadened eligibility to include self-employed individuals and ICs. However, these benefits expired on July 31, and the expanded eligibility covering self-employed people and independent contractors expires at the end of December. As mentioned, there are currently around 40,000 ICs working in the travel agency industry, and their business income has seized up along with every other part of the industry. Both they and laid-off or furloughed travel agency W-2 employees deserve support while the travel industry recovers. As such, ASTA supports extending the CARES Act unemployment provisions through March 31, 2021.

While it will take years for the travel agency industry to recover from this crisis, taken together we believe the steps outlined above will help speed that recovery and put travel agencies in a position to serve clients once the economy rebounds.

Thank you for work so far to respond to this crisis and to lay the groundwork for our eventual recovery, and for considering our views at what we know is a challenging time for you. We stand ready to provide any information necessary to bring to fruition the items outlined above.

Yours Sincerely,



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