

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 17, 2021

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

Dear Mr. President:

We write to request urgent changes to the National Interest Exception (NIE) travel waiver program that would remove obstacles currently impeding Georgia's post-pandemic economic recovery. Specifically, we urge you to reinstate the NIE waiver process at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and ensure that waiver requests are handled in a timely and consistent manner.

Employers and workers are battling severe delays and red tape in their efforts to obtain approval for travelers to gain entry into the United States to work on major and economically vital projects in Georgia, such as television, film, entertainment, and fashion productions.

In March, CBP stopped adjudicating requests for NIEs, the waiver that business travelers from certain countries must obtain before entering the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such requests are now submitted to and adjudicated by U.S. Department of State consulates and embassies abroad.

However, reduced staffing and operations at these State Department facilities have resulted in unacceptably long processing delays and appointment cancellations. Individual embassies also handle NIE requests differently, resulting in inconsistent and unpredictable outcomes. These waivers are critical to Georgia's economic recovery, but the current slow and uncertain process is impeding production companies' ability to plan ahead and resume normal operations.

Georgia is one of the top filming locations worldwide. In 2019, before COVID-19, television and film production in Georgia injected \$2.9 billion in direct production spending into the U.S. economy—a record-breaking impact—and supported over 150,000 jobs and \$8.9 billion in wages in our state.¹

¹ Ryan Dennis, *Gov. Kemp: Booming TV & film industry brought \$2.9 billion in Georgia investment*, 11Alive, (Sept. 16, 2019), <https://www.11alive.com/article/entertainment/television/programs/the-a-scene/recording-breaking-year-for-georgia-film/85-e41c1337-3754-4d9d-a38e-565f95392d6a>.

While production ground to a halt during the coronavirus pandemic, the industry is beginning to rebound. That recovery, however, has been hampered by the obstacles faced in trying to bring essential cast and crew into the U.S. for filming when such cast and crew are located outside of the country. The production of films and television series is costly, and losing a single day can cost productions hundreds of thousands of dollars, rendering them uneconomical and costing U.S. jobs and revenues. Production delays and cancellations harm not only their employees—including the dozens or hundreds of Georgia workers that each of these projects employ directly—but also local businesses in hospitality, restaurants, catering, construction, and more.

With strong safety protocols in place and COVID-19 cases continuing to trend downward, the television, film, entertainment, and fashion production industries—and the jobs and local investment they support—are poised for a strong rebound. We urge you to support Georgia’s economic recovery by reinstating an efficient and uniform NIE waiver system at CBP.

Thank you for your immediate consideration of this urgent issue.


Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



Carolyn Bourdeaux
Member of Congress



Earl L. “Buddy” Carter
Member of Congress



Drew Ferguson, IV
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath
Member of Congress



Austin Scott
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress