

# United States Senate

March 16, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Vice President Pence:

We write to you today with regard to recent reports of large crowds and long wait times at airports following the announcement and implementation of travel restrictions on European nations.

As you know, on March 11, 2020, President Trump announced that travelers from Europe would not be permitted to enter the United States, effective 11:59 p.m. March 13, 2020. This prohibition was clarified to apply to countries within the Schengen Area, excluding U.S. citizens, their immediate family members, and Legal Permanent Residents. The restrictions were later expanded to include the United Kingdom and Ireland beginning on March 15, 2020.

While we must take all necessary steps to protect our communities from COVID-19, there have been widespread reports of massive crowds and significant delays at the designated airports around the country where Americans returning from Europe are being directed. At a time when medical and public health experts, including those within the Trump Administration, are recommending that people avoid large crowds and practice social distancing, it is irresponsible to have large numbers of people, who the Administration has deemed are traveling from high-risk areas, congregating in enclosed spaces within our airports for extended periods of time.

It is obvious from what we have witnessed at our airports that there was little preparation made for the inevitable influx of Americans returning from Europe upon the public announcement of travel restrictions, and that the administration rushed into this decision without adequate planning or forethought, risking further compounding a public health crisis”

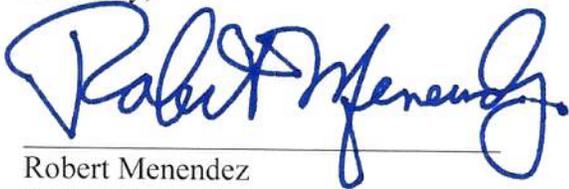
As such, I urge the Administration to provide all necessary resources to our airports to be able to quickly and efficiently screen and process travelers returning from impacted countries, and request answers to the below questions no later than March xx, 2020:

1. Did the Administration consider the likelihood of large volumes of Americans returning from Europe after the announcement of the travel restrictions?
2. If so, how was this information incorporated into the rollout of the restrictions in order to ensure an orderly and efficient re-entry process upon arrival at designated airports?
3. Was any consultation made with airlines and other stakeholders prior to the announcement of the restrictions, and in the lead-up to their implementation, in order to understand the volume of passengers who would likely be returning?

4. What provisions has the Administration made to help airports process the large volumes of Americans returning from Europe due to the travel restrictions announced March 11<sup>th</sup> and March 14<sup>th</sup>?
  - a. What guidance was issued to airports, airlines, and the relevant federal employees at these airports prior to the implementation of these travel restrictions?
  - b. Were any additional resources redirected to designated airports following the announcement of the travel restrictions? Please provide detailed information regarding the specific resources that have been, or are planned to be, deployed to each of the 13 designated airports.
    - i. If so, why was the ability of these airports to quickly and efficiently repatriate returning travelers so far below demand?
    - ii. If not, will you commit to providing additional resources as necessary to airports to which Americans returning from Europe are being directed?
5. Prior to the travel restrictions going into effect, some travelers from high-risk areas reported facing no enhanced screening at all. Additionally, following the announcement of the restrictions, some travelers reported that they did not undergo additional screening upon arrival in the U.S. despite being in close proximity to those traveling from high-risk areas.
  - a. Did Customs and Border Protection (CBP) add additional staff to process the “enhanced screening” at airports?
  - b. What are the enhanced screening measures that are currently being implemented at the 13 designated airports, and which travelers are subject to them?
6. Will you commit to closely coordinating any future response with state and local officials and the private sector to ensure resources are properly deployed?

We thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Cory Booker  
United States Senator