

HENRY CUELLAR, PH.D.
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 16, 2021

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr Ave SE
Washington, DC 20528-0525

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

As the United States continues to combat the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, thousands of American small businesses are facing economic challenges presented by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) prohibition on "non-essential" cross-border travel. The yearlong halt to DHS discretionary travel at Land Ports of Entry has left local communities, across both the southern and northern U.S. borders, struggling to maintain their livelihoods and way of life. We must find a balance between the health of the individual and the health of the local economy.

After hearing from my constituents, local community leaders, and other Border Representatives in Congress, I believe that the U.S. can safely reopen its Land Ports of Entry to "non-essential" travel, on a localized basis. If a community feels that they can safely open their economy to "non-essential" travelers, then they can engage DHS through this proposal. If a community wishes to continue to restrict "non-essential" travel through local border crossings, then they have the option for DHS to maintain its current restrictions at that location. This is an ideal approach because it will allow local communities to maintain control over their public health decisions.

Therefore, I am respectfully requesting that DHS establish and implement a community-based program to partially lift COVID-19 travel restrictions for "non-essential" travelers at international Land Ports of Entry. In doing so, I ask that you:

- (1) Consult with local community leaders and their medical personnel, along with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), to determine criteria necessary to partially lift COVID-19 travel restrictions within border community jurisdictions that accommodate international Land Ports of Entry; and
- (2) Partially lift COVID-19 related travel restrictions for "non-essential" travelers and safely resume all cross-border operations, at both the southern and northern U.S. borders, for those communities who meet the pre-determined criteria. This includes restoring "non-essential" traveler lanes and reinstating U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers to oversee traffic in those lanes. Border communities will subsequently enforce their own jurisdictional COVID-19 public health orders.

This means that “non-essential” travelers will be screened twice when entering the U.S: first, through medical screenings by CBP officers, pursuant to federal protocols; and second, through community health screenings by local personnel.

Permitting border communities to help determine a safe and enforceable approach for partially lifting COVID-19 travel restrictions, on a localized basis, will establish a balance between the health of their residents and the health of their economies. Thank you for considering this request and remaining attentive to the needs of my constituents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henry Cuellar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'H' and 'C'.

Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress
28th District of Texas