



March 23, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We appreciate your leadership throughout the COVID-19 crisis and now as the country recovers from the impacts of the pandemic. During the global health crisis, U.S. airlines have supported and cooperated with the federal government's measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. We are encouraged by the current data and the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions from coast to coast, which indicate it is past time to eliminate COVID-era transportation policies.

Our industry has leaned into science at every turn. At the outset, we voluntarily implemented policies and procedures -- mandating face coverings; requiring passenger health acknowledgements and contact tracing information; and enhancing cleaning protocols -- to form a multi-layered approach to mitigate risk and prioritize the wellbeing of passengers and employees. We supported the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as they made some of these policies federal mandates and imposed additional measures, like predeparture testing and vaccination requirements for international travelers, in an to attempt to slow the introduction of variants into the United States.

However, much has changed since these measures were imposed and they no longer make sense in the current public health context. The persistent and steady decline of hospitalization and death rates are the most compelling indicators that our country is well protected against severe disease from COVID-19. Given that we have entered a different phase of dealing with this virus, we strongly support your view that "COVID-19 need no longer control our lives."

**Now is the time for the Administration to sunset federal transportation travel restrictions -- including the international predeparture testing requirement and the federal mask mandate -- that are no longer aligned with the realities of the current epidemiological environment.**

### **Predeparture Test Requirement**

The predeparture test requirement, imposed to slow the introduction of variants into the U.S., has outlived its utility and stymies the return of international travel. The United Kingdom (UK), the European Union and Canada have recognized this reality and lifted travel restrictions. The U.S. inconsistency with these practices creates a competitive disadvantage for U.S. travel and tourism by placing an additional cost and burden on travel to the U.S. Further, many outbound travelers are not willing to risk being stranded overseas. In the Tenth Meeting of the Emergency Committee on January 19, 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) noted that "**the failure**

**of travel restrictions introduced after the detection and reporting of Omicron variant to limit international spread of Omicron demonstrates the ineffectiveness of such measures over time.”** The WHO recommended that countries consider a risk-based approach to the facilitation of international travel by lifting measures, like testing and/or quarantine requirements, for individual travelers who are fully vaccinated with COVID-19 vaccines listed by the WHO.<sup>1</sup> Finally, a recent study by Oxera and Edge Health that examined the effectiveness of travel restrictions in Europe concluded that such measures have failed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>

### **Mask Mandate**

The science clearly supports lifting the mask mandate, as demonstrated by the recently released CDC framework indicating that 99 percent of the U.S. population no longer need to wear masks indoors. Several studies completed **before we had the added layer of widespread availability of vaccines**, including one from Harvard’s T.H. Chan School of Public Health<sup>3</sup> and another from the U.S. Department of Defense<sup>4</sup>, have concluded that an airplane cabin is one of the safest indoor environments due to the combination of highly filtered air and constant air flow coupled with the downward direction of the air. Lifting the mask mandate in airports and onboard aircraft can be done safely as England has done. Importantly, the effectiveness and availability of high-quality masks for those who wish to wear them gives passengers the ability to further protect themselves if they choose to do so. It makes no sense that people are still required to wear masks on airplanes, yet are allowed to congregate in crowded restaurants, schools and at sporting events without masks, despite none of these venues having the protective air filtration system that aircraft do.

It is critical to recognize that the burden of enforcing both the mask and predeparture testing requirements has fallen on our employees for two years now. This is not a function they are trained to perform and subjects them to daily challenges by frustrated customers. This in turn takes a toll on their own well-being.

The high level of immunity in the U.S., availability of high-quality masks for those who wish to use them, hospital-grade cabin air, widespread vaccine availability and newly available therapeutics provide a strong foundation for the Administration to lift the mask mandate and predeparture testing requirements. We urge you to do so now.

We are requesting this action not only for the benefit the of the traveling public, but also for the thousands of airline employees charged with enforcing a patchwork of now-outdated regulations implemented in response to COVID-19.

Respectfully,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.who.int/news/item/19-01-2022-statement-on-the-tenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-pandemic](https://www.who.int/news/item/19-01-2022-statement-on-the-tenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic)

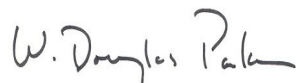
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.iata.org/contentassets/31f976cb5de0427cbe4a85958857a472/oxera.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://npli.sph.harvard.edu/resources-2/aviation-public-health-initiative-aphi/>

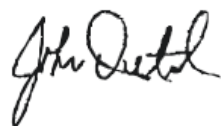
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ustranscom.mil/cmd/panewsreader.cfm?ID=C0EC1D60-CB57-C6ED-90DEDA305CE7459D>



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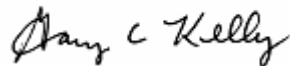
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March 23, 2022

Page 4

cc: The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation  
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security  
The Honorable Gina Raimondo, U.S. Secretary of Commerce  
The Honorable Ron Klain, White House Chief of Staff  
The Honorable Steve Ricchetti, Counselor to the President  
The Honorable Jeffrey Zients, White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator  
The Honorable Brian Deese, Director of the National Economic Council