

Rep. Alcee L. Hastings, *Florida*
Chairman

Sen. Roger F. Wicker, *Mississippi*
Co-Chairman



September 2, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pack
Chief Executive Officer
U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM)
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20237

Dear Mr. Pack,

We write to express our deep concern regarding J-1 visa renewals for foreign Voice of America (VOA) journalists. Failure to renew their visas has resulted in urgent departures from the United States for these journalists back to their countries of origin. As a result, many these individuals and their families will be forced to return to countries, including China and Russia, where journalists are regularly targeted and silenced for their reporting. For journalists who have carried out the VOA mission of “producing accurate, balanced and comprehensive reporting, programming, online and social media content for a global audience, particularly to those who are denied access to open and free media,” the personal risk may be even greater.

It further is concerning that these VOA reporters were not informed directly of this change to USAGM policy or given any notice on the renewal status of their J-1 visas. These journalists have worked tirelessly to serve freedom-loving people worldwide—even in some cases risking the distrust of their own governments—and should be treated with basic decency and dignity by USAGM leadership. Instead, they face fear and uncertainty regarding their own livelihoods and the future of their families.

The journalists in question do the important work of providing unbiased news and information to the most closed-off corners of the world. They play a pivotal role at Voice of America because of their critical language skills and connections within the countries they cover.

We urge you to answer questions from the Congress on this matter immediately. The Congress still has not been informed about the specifics of USAGM’s new policy and for what reason the routine J-1 visa renewal process for these individuals has been stalled. We request a briefing on this policy within the next 30 days. Additionally, we ask that you put into place a policy outlining USAGM’s steps to protect the personal security of VOA journalists working under its auspices.

Sincerely,

Alcee L. Hastings, M.C.
Chairman

Benjamin L. Cardin, U.S.S.
Ranking Member



Emanuel Cleaver, M.C.
Commissioner



Jeanne Shaheen, U.S.S.
Commissioner



Steve Cohen, M.C.
Commissioner



Marc Veasey, M.C.
Commissioner